

For Reference

NOT TO BE TAKEN FROM THIS ROOM

For Reference

NOT TO BE TAKEN FROM THIS ROOM

Ex LIBRIS
UNIVERSITATIS
ALBERTAENSIS





Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2019 with funding from
University of Alberta Libraries

<https://archive.org/details/Scott1961>

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE MINOR CHARACTERS IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF
MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

by

MERLE I. SCOTT

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

MARCH 27, 1961

ABSTRACT

There are about eight hundred minor characters in Shakespeare's plays. They are likely to be neglected by students, but they nonetheless perform functions necessary to the plays. Many of them forward the action. Others are used to characterize, or to identify, or to act as foil to, a major character. Some are important in overcoming problems of staging, some in creating dramatic effects, such as irony and foreshadowing. And some even point out the theme of the play. Whatever their tasks, the minor characters generally carry them out quickly and efficiently: and, moreover, truthfully.

P R E F A C E

Quotations from the plays follow the text and lineation of The Complete Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare, ed, W. A. Neilson and C. J. Hill, Houghton Mifflin Co. (Cambridge, Mass., 1942). The abbreviations of play titles are also those of Neilson and Hill. Footnotes are listed at the end of the thesis. Stage directions quoted are, in all cases, those of either the folio or the quarto texts (depending upon which is generally agreed to give the more authoritative version). The abbreviation "sd." stands for "stage direction."

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	v
Chapter I : Minor Characters Concerned with the Staging . .	1
(1) The Establishing of Time, Place, Atmosphere . .	1
(2) A Part of the Setting	4
(3) The Interrelating of Scenes	5
(4) The Indicating of the Passage of Time	7
(5) The Motivating of an Exit	10
Chapter II : Minor Characters Concerned with Another Character	20
(1) The Identification of Other Characters	20
(2) The Directing of Attention to Other Characters .	22
(3) The Characterization of Others	27
(4) Straight Man	43
(5) Foil	49
(6) The Directing of Sympathies	55
(7) The Occasioning of a Speech, Action	60
Chapter III : Minor Characters Concerned with Dramatic Effect	65
(1) Irony	65
(2) Suspense	69
(3) Foreshadowing	72
(4) Contrast	78
(5) Realism	85
(6) Amplification	86
(7) Emphasis	90
Chapter IV : Minor Characters Concerned with the Action. . .	96
(1) The Initiating of the Action	96
(2) The Forwarding of the Action: Directly	106
(3) The Forwarding of the Action: Indirectly	117
(4) The Concluding of the Action	124
Chapter V : Other Minor Characters	129
Chapter VI : Conclusion	141
Footnotes	145

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an analysis of Shakespeare's use of minor characters. The aim has been to point out why the minor character is introduced into the play — what purpose he serves. In broader terms, the thesis attempts to demonstrate that the role of the minor character is of more importance than has been realized: and, indeed, may often affect the interpretation of the plays. Consequently, critical pronouncements regarding interpretation have been interjected when they seemed pertinent, even though the primary concern is with the technique of play-writing.

Minor characters have been categorized according to their function in the plays: there is naturally some overlapping. Similarly, the definition of a minor character must not be regarded as an uncontravenable rule. In general, minor characters appear in no more than two scenes and speak no more than fifty lines. But Cornelius, who speaks seventy - three lines in two scenes of Cymbeline, I class as a minor character; while the Prince of Wales, who speaks forty - three lines, appearing in one scene only of Richard the Third, I do not. The criterion: Is the character a necessary and integral part of the action? Minor characters are always on the edge of the action; they are not indispensable. The Apothecary in Romeo and Juliet, though at first glance he seems necessary to the action, really

is not: Shakespeare could have had Romeo merely announce that he had obtained poison, and thereby eliminated the Apothecary entirely. In any event, the thesis approaches minor characters from the viewpoint of dramatic technique; and most of the minor characters discussed speak only three or four lines.

All of Shakespeare's plays have been examined except Henry the Eighth and the three parts of Henry the Sixth.

These four plays have been excluded because there is as yet no general agreement among scholars as to how much of them is to be attributed to Shakespeare.

Chapter I

MINOR CHARACTERS CONCERNED WITH THE STAGING

Here, perhaps, is the most obvious use of the minor character. He is used to establish the time, the place, and the atmosphere; to contribute to the general setting; to interrelate scenes; to indicate the passage of time; and to motivate exits. Now Shakespeare did not, of course, have the same concept of a "scene" as we do today: the term is quite legitimate, however, if we remember to apply it in its Shakespearian sense, as signifying only a space of continuous action, ending when the stage is cleared for a moment or two.

(1) The Establishing of Time, Place, Atmosphere

Since the Elizabethan stage did not make nearly as much use of scenery as our modern stage does, the Elizabethan audience could not be expected to know at a glance the locale of a particular scene. Quite often, therefore, Shakespeare found it necessary to convey this information through a minor character introduced solely for this purpose. For instance, II, iii of Much Ado About Nothing begins with this exchange:

Bene.	Boy!
Boy.	Signior?
Bene.	In my chamber-window lies a book; bring it hither to me in the orchard.

Boy. I am here already, sir.
(1-5)

The Boy serves only to tell us that the scene is set in an orchard — he never does return with the book. Similarly, Francisca, in I, iv of Measure for Measure, establishes the place as a nunnery:

Isab. And have you nuns no farther privileges?
 Fran. Are not these large enough?
 Isab. Yes, truly. I speak not as desiring more,
 But rather wishing a more strict restraint
 Upon the sisterhood, the votaries of Saint Clare.
 (1-5)

and the Citizen, in IV, iv of Coriolanus, tells us that the scene is now Aufidius' house in Corioli:

Cor. Direct me, if it be your will,
 Where great Aufidius lies. Is he in Antium?
 Cit. He is, and feasts the nobles of the state
 At his house this night.
 Cor. Which is his house, beseech you?
 Cit. This, here before you.
 (7-11)

In much the same way, minor characters are sometimes used to establish the time. So the Lady in II, ii of Cymbeline does:

Imo. Who's there? My woman Helen?
 Lady. Please you, madam.
 Imo. What hour is it?
 Lady. Almost midnight, madam.
 (1-2)

And in the Second Part of Henry the Fourth, two Grooms tell us the relative time (just after the coronation):

1.Groom. More rushes, more rushes.
 2.Groom. The trumpets have sounded twice.
 1.Groom. 'Twill be two o'clock ere they come
 from the coronation. Dispatch, dispatch.
 (V, v, 1-4)

And, finally, minor characters are occasionally used to establish the atmosphere. In A Midsummer-Night's Dream, the first scene in which the fairies appear begins:

Robin. How now, spirit! whither wander you?
 Fai. Over hill, over dale,
 Thorough bush, thorough brier,
 Over park, over pale,
 Thorough flood, thorough fire,
 I do wander every where,
 Swifter than the moon's sphere;
 And I serve the fairy Queen,
 To dew her orbs upon the green.
 The cowslips tall her pensioners be;
 In their gold coats spots you see;
 Those be rubies, fairy favours,
 In those freckles live their savours.
 I must go seek some dewdrops here
 And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear.
 Farewell, thou lob of spirits; I'll be gone.
 Our Queen and all her elves come here anon.
 (II, i, 1-17)

The Fairy's poem conveys the atmosphere of enchantment. And so with the Ship-Master and the Boatswain in The Tempest: the Boatswain, indeed, is virtually the entire storm:

Mast. Boatswain!
 Boats. Here, master; what cheer?
 Mast. Good; speak to th' mariners. Fall
 to't, yarely, or we run ourselves aground.
 Bestir, bestir.
 Boats. Heigh, my hearts! cheerly, cheerly, my
 hearts! yare, yare! Take in the topsail. Tend to
 the master's whistle. — Blow till thou burst thy
 wind, if room enough!
 (I, i, 1-9)

Many other minor characters are used to establish time, place,

ed

and atmosphere, generally with equal efficiency. ^{1.}

(2) A Part of the Setting

Some characters appear in a play simply because they are appropriate to a particular situation. For instance, the Justice in Measure for Measure, II, i — the scene in which Pompey and Froth are examined — is present only because it is logical that he should be present; and James Gurney, who appears in the opening scene of King John, appears only because it is necessary that Lady Faulconbridge be attended (we should notice, though, that Philip has the delicacy to send him off when he brings up the subject of his parentage — and is thereby characterized). Although the Justice speaks three lines, and Gurney one, these characters most often say nothing at all: and their presence in the play is indicated by only a stage direction. They swell the entourage of a general: "Enter Cominius the General, and Titus Lartius; between them, Coriolanus, crown'd with an oaken garland; with Captains and Soldiers, and a Herald" (Cor, II, i, sd.178); and they congregate about a king: "Enter King Richard, John of Gaunt, with other Nobles and Attendants" (R2, sd. beginning I, i). We are told a good deal about their role in the plays by Shakespeare's stage direction in Titus Andronicus:

Sound drums and trumpets, and then enter two of Titus' sons; and then two Men bearing a coffin covered with

black; then two other sons. Then Titus Andronicus;
and then Tamora, the Queen of Goths and her sons
Demetrius, and Chiron; and with Aaron the Moor, and
others as many as can be.

(I, i, sd. 69)

They are, really, little more than a part of the setting.

These characters abound throughout the plays: and it
would consequently be a mere labor of love to list them.

(3) The Interrelating of Scenes.

The action of the first scene of The Comedy of Errors
is as follows: AEgeon, a merchant of Syracuse, is condemned
to death by the Duke of Ephesus, because it is law that "if any
Syracusan born/ Come to the bay of Ephesus, he dies . . ."
(19-20). Asked why he has come to Ephesus, AEgeon relates
the sad tale of the family's separation; and is then led off in
the Gaoler's custody. The second scene of the play begins with
a Merchant speaking these words to Antipholus of Syracuse:

Therefore give out you are of Epidamnum,
Lest that your goods, too, soon be confiscate.
This very day a Syracusan merchant
Is apprehended for arrival here;
And, not being able to buy out his life
According to the statute of the town,
Dies ere the weary sun set in the west.
There is your money that I had to keep.

(1-8)

This Merchant is introduced only to interrelate scenes one
and two. He declines Antipholus' invitation to "walk about the
town," though arranging to meet him at five o'clock: but we never

hear of him again. He is, of course, quite necessary: without him, scene two has no apparent connection with the opening scene.

In the Second Part of Henry the Fourth, Gower serves much the same purpose except that he relates a scene to a following, rather than a preceding, scene. He tells the Chief Justice, in II, i, that,

The King, my lord, and Harry Prince of Wales
Are near at hand.
(146-147)

The next scene begins with the entrance of Prince Henry and Poins. Similarly, a Messenger in III, i of The Taming of the Shrew says to Bianca,

Mistress, your father prays you leave your books
And help to dress your sister's chamber up.
You know to-morrow is the wedding-day.
(82-84)

thereby preparing for the next — the wedding — scene. (We should notice that both Gower and this Messenger also serve to clear the stage.)

And for a final example, there is the Herald in Othello, who proclaims:

It is Othello's pleasure, our noble and
valiant general, that, upon certain tidings now
arriv'd importing the mere perdition of the
Turkish fleet, every man put himself into
triumph; some to dance, some to make
bonfires, each man to what sport and revels
his addiction leads him; for, besides these
beneficial news, it is the celebration of his
nuptial.
(II, ii, 1-8)

This Herald is a scene in himself, and ties in II, i - the arrival of

Othello, Desdemona, and company in Cyprus - to II, iii - the scene of Cassio's disgrace.²

(4) The Indicating of the Passage of Time.

Occasionally, Shakespeare finds it necessary to insert a scene of only a few lines, the sole function of which is to indicate the passage of time. And sometimes a minor character finds a place in one of these scenes. In Act III of Antony and Cleopatra, for instance, between Antony's decision to fight by sea and his defeat, there occurs this scene:

Enter Caesar, with his army, marching.

Caes. Taurus!
 Taur. My lord?
 Caes. Strike not by land; keep whole; provoke not battle
 Till we have done at sea. Do not exceed
 The prescript of this scroll. Our fortune lies
 Upon this jump.
 (III, viii)

This is the entire scene.

In Act I of Coriolanus, between the second entrance of the Romans into battle and Coriolanus' meeting with Aufidius, there occurs this scene:

Titus Lartius, having set a guard upon Corioli,
 going with drum and trumpet toward Cominius and
 Caius Marcius, enters with a Lieutenant, other
 Soldiers, and a Scout.

Lart. So, let the ports be guarded; keep your duties,
 As I have set them down. If I do send, dispatch
 Those centuries to our aid; the rest will serve
 For a short holding. If we lose the field,
 We cannot keep the town.

Lieu. Fear not our care, sir.
 Lart. Hence, and shut your gates upon 's.
 Our guider, come; to th' Roman camp conduct us.
 (I, vii)

Both Taurus, of the scene from Antony and Cleopatra, and the Lieutenant, from Coriolanus, appear only to take part in these two scenes; and the scenes occur in the plays largely to indicate the passage of time.

We find another example of minor characters being used for this purpose in Cymbeline, III, vii. Here, the minor characters are the entire scene:

1. Sen. This is the tenour of the Emperor's writ:
 That since the common men are now in action
 'Gainst the Pannonians and Dalmatians,
 And that the legions now in Gallia are
 Full weak to undertake our wars against
 The fall'n-off Britons, that we do incite
 The gentry to this business. He creates
 Lucius proconsul; and to you the tribunes,
 For this immediate levy, he commands
 His absolute commission. Long live Caesar!
 1. Tri. Is Lucius general of the forces?
 2. Sen. Ay.
 1. Tri. Remaining now in Gallia?
 1. Sen. With those legions
 Which I have spoke of, whereunto your levy
 Must be supplyant. The words of your commission
 Will tie you to the numbers and the time
 Of their dispatch.
 1. Tri. We will discharge our duty.

The scene — and therefore the minor characters — are necessary to indicate the passage of time between III, vi, the arrival of Imogen at the cave of Belarius, and IV, ii, the supposed death of Imogen.

Similarly, IV, ii of As You Like It indicates the passage

of time between IV, i and IV, iii. Orlando has told Rosalind in IV, i: "For these two hours, Rosalind, I will leave thee" (180-181); and, "I must attend the Duke at dinner. By two o'clock I will be with thee again" (184-185). The action of IV, iii, therefore, begins at two o'clock: Rosalind and Celia enter to meet Orlando. To indicate the lapse of time between these two scenes, a Forester is brought on, along with Jaques and two or three Lords. The Forester is asked to sing a song, and does so:

Jaq. Have you no song, forester, for this purpose?

1. For. Yes, sir.

Jaq. Sing it. 'Tis no matter how it be in
tune, so it make noise enough.

Song.

1. For. What shall he have that killed the deer?
His leather skin and horns to wear.

Then sing him home.

Take thou no scorn to wear the horn;

It was a crest ere thou wast born;

Thy father's father wore it,

And thy father bore it.

The horn, the horn, the lusty horn

Is not a thing to laugh to scorn.

(6-19)

Everyone then exits. For the same purpose, two Pages are introduced between V, ii and V, iv — they also sing a song:

It was a lover and his lass,

With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino,

That o'er the green corn-field did pass

In the spring time, the only pretty ring time,

When birds do sing, hey ding a ding, ding;

Sweet lovers love the spring.

(17-22)

And, finally, in IV, i of Measure for Measure, a Boy is used to indicate the passage of a certain amount of time between the

Duke's exit in III, ii and his reappearance in IV, i:

Song.
 Take, O, take those lips away,
 That so sweetly were forsworn;
 And those eyes, the break of day,
 Lights that do mislead the morn;
 But my kisses bring again, bring again;
 Seals of love, but seal'd in vain, seal'd in vain.
 (1-6)

By such devices the passage of time is neatly and unobtrusively indicated. ³.

(5) The Motivating of an Exit.

Rather oddly, dramatic convention allows a character to come on stage for no particular reason -- but he cannot go off stage for no particular reason. He must have some sort of excuse. Quite often, these excuses are supplied by minor characters. In I, iii of Romeo and Juliet, for instance, a Servant enters to Lady Capulet, Juliet, and the Nurse, and delivers this breathless report:

Madam, the guests are come, supper serv'd
 up, you call'd, my young lady ask'd for, the
 nurse curs'd in the pantry, and everything in
 extremity. I must hence to wait; I beseech
 you, follow straight.
 (100-103)

He exits, as Lady Capulet says:

We follow thee. Juliet, the County stays.
 (104-105)

and the Nurse:

Go, girl, seek happy nights to happy days.
 (106)

And exeunt. Through the expedient of the Servant, the scene is brought to a swift close.

In like manner, a Servant enters to Antony in the central scene of Julius Caesar — after Antony has sent the Plebeians about their "mischief" — and this exchange takes place:

Serv. Sir, Octavius is already come to Rome.
 Ant. Where is he?
 Serv. He and Lepidus are at Caesar's house.
 Ant. And thither will I straight to visit him;
 He comes upon a wish. Fortune is merry,
 And in this mood will give us anything.
 Serv. I heard him say, Brutus and Cassius
 Are rid like madmen through the gates of Rome.
 Ant. Belike they had some notice of the people,
 How I had mov'd them. Bring me to Octavius.
 (III, ii, 267-276)

They go out; the scene ends. And so in Coriolanus, II, i, where a Messenger says to Brutus and Sicinius:

You are sent for to the Capitol. 'Tis thought
 That Marcius shall be consul.
 I have seen the dumb men throng to see him, and
 The blind to hear him speak. Matrons flung gloves,
 Ladies and maids their scarfs and handkerchers
 Upon him as he pass'd; the nobles bended,
 As to Jove's statue, and the commons made
 A shower and thunder with their caps and shouts.
 I never saw the like.
 (276-284)

Brutus replies,

Let's to the Capitol;
 And carry with us ears and eyes for th' time,
 But hearts for the event.
 (284-286)

and, again, the scene ends.

As can be seen from these examples, the minor character delivers certain information to a character already on stage, which

information causes him to exit. Now this information is always correct. Whatever minor characters say we may regard as absolutely true: for, being character-less, these people have no reason to lie. So when Peto, in the Second Part of Henry the Fourth, says to the Prince:

The King your father is at Westminster;
And there are twenty weak and wearied posts
Come from the north; and, as I came along,
I met and overtook a dozen captains,
Bare-headed, sweating, knocking at the taverns,
And asking every one for Sir John Falstaff.
(II, iv, 384-389)

we may be sure that there are a dozen sweating captains looking for Falstaff. Now these dozen captains have always formed a large part of the argument of the Falstaff apologists — those critics who are determined to find in Falstaff a great nobility of some sort. Because there are a dozen captains in search of Falstaff, it is obvious that the King cannot move his right arm without Falstaff's assistance. But it is precisely the truth of Peto's statement that ridicules Falstaff. If there were one or two captains looking for Falstaff, good and well; but twelve of them is matter for laughter only. Shakespeare means us to perceive the utter incongruity of half the officers of the King's army earnestly seeking after Falstaff — Falstaff, whose fame consists in his having stabbed the dead Hotspur in the thigh.

In any event, these minor characters, while they motivate exits, do not always bring a scene to a close. In Twelfth Night,

for instance, a Servant reports to Olivia:

Madam, the young gentleman of the Count
Orsino's is return'd. I could hardly entreat
him back. He attends your ladyship's
pleasure.

(III, iv, 63-65)

Olivia exits, with Maria, but Malvolio remains — to misinterpret,
in a soliloquy, everything that Olivia has said:

O, ho! do you come near me now? No
worse man than Sir Toby to look to me!
This concurs directly with the letter. She
sends him on purpose, that I may appear
stubborn to him, for she incites me to that
in the letter. "Cast thy humble slough,"
says she; "be opposite with a kinsman,
surly with servants"

(71-77)

And so forth. Much the same thing occurs in The Merchant of Venice, III, i, where a Servant causes Salanio and Salarino to exit with the message:

Gentlemen, my master Antonio is at his
house and desires to speak with you both.

(77-78)

Shylock is left on stage with Tubal, alternately to curse his daughter and gloat over Antonio's misfortunes. In these two examples, the minor character motivates an exit not to clear the stage, but to allow a self-revelatory soliloquy. (Shylock's conversation with Tubal is the next thing to a soliloquy: Tubal is present only to occasion Shylock's outbursts, and is little more than a messenger. Shakespeare, incidentally, does not handle Tubal too well here: we have the feeling that Tubal is almost baiting Shylock — and both are Jews. But The Merchant is an

early play.)

We should also compare Troilus and Cressida, I, ii, where Troilus' Boy removes Pandarus with the message: "Sir, my lord would instantly speak with you" (298). Cressida is then left alone to soliloquize:

. . . More in Troilus thousandfold I see
Than in the glass of Pandar's praise may be;
Yet hold I off. Women are angels, wooing.
Things won are done, joy's soul lies in the doing.
That she belov'd knows nought that knows not this:
Men prize the thing ungain'd more than it is.
That she was never yet that ever knew
Love got so sweet as when desire did sue.
Therefore this maxim out of love I teach:
Achievement is command; ungain'd, beseech.
Then though my heart's content firm love doth bear,
Nothing of that shall from mine eyes appear.
(310-321)

And so in All's Well That Ends Well, I, i, where Bertram's Page tells Parolles, "Monsieur Parolles, my lord calls for you" (201); and Helena, after both have exited, then muses:

Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie,
Which we ascribe to heaven. The fated sky
Gives us free scope, only doth backward pull
Our slow designs when we ourselves are dull.
What power is it which mounts my love so high,
That makes me see, and cannot feed mine eye?
The mightiest space in fortune nature brings
To join like likes and kiss like native things.
Impossible be strange attempts to those
That weigh their pains in sense and do suppose
What hath been cannot be. Who ever strove
To show her merit, that did miss her love?
(231-242)

In this role — providing an opportunity for a soliloquy — the minor character is really quite important to the play as a whole, inasmuch as Shakespeare uses the soliloquy to lay bare the character

of the speaker. Malvolio, for instance, betrays himself as an "affection'd ass"; and Cressida tells us the real nature of her love for Troilus:

Things won are done, joy's soul lies in
the doing.

But what of Helena's soliloquy? Before making any pronouncements, let me first emphasize, once again, the importance of these soliloquies. Shakespeare, let us not forget, has gone to a good deal of trouble to make them possible: he has introduced a minor character for this sole purpose. He must feel that they are important to the play. Now — Helena's soliloquy. A line-and-a-half should tell us all we need to know:

Who ever strove
To show her merit, that did miss her love?

Given that Helena possesses this conviction, how can we condemn her for the bed-trick? Shakespeare, obviously, did not mean her to be condemned.

And, finally, Shylock. It is true, of course, that Shakespeare's Shylock is a much more credible villain than the usual Machiavellian schemer. Critics point to the "Hath not a Jew" speech and talk of Shylock's real humanity. But Shylock is a hypocrite; and I do not feel that there can be any doubt regarding Shakespeare's opinion of his villain. Immediately after Shylock's passionate outburst, Shakespeare introduces a Servant to hustle Salanio and Salarino off stage; and then gives

us the conversation (if it can be called a conversation) between Tubal and Shylock. Why? Surely to indicate that Shylock's speech is little more than hypocritical self-justification. What kind of humanity is there in a man who can say:

I would my daughter were dead at my foot,
and the jewels in her ear! Would she were
hears'd at my foot, and the ducats in her
coffin!

(III, i, 91-94)

And the scene ends with Shylock saying:

I will have the heart of him, if he forfeit;
for, were he out of Venice, I can make what
merchandise I will.

(132-134)

Shylock is a man consumed with greed; and any finer feelings he may have must wait attendance upon this greed. (We should keep in mind that The Merchant of Venice is an early play, and Shakespeare is an amateur playwright: uneven characterization is therefore to be expected. It is Shakespeare's intention that we must attempt to discover.)

Two other minor characters in this category may be mentioned, both messengers: the one in III, v of Much Ado About Nothing, and the other in V, ii of Love's Labour's Lost. The first, in Much Ado, enters to Leonato, and summons him with:

My lord, they stay for you to give your
daughter to her husband.

(59-60)

Leonato replies, "I'll wait upon them; I am ready" (61); and

they both exit. To appreciate fully the role of this Messenger, we must be aware of what has already taken place in this scene. It begins with the entrance of Leonato, Dogberry, and Verges. The latter two have come to tell Leonato of Don John's villainy; of how he has deceived Claudio into believing Hero guilty of "luxurious" behavior. But with Dogberry and Verges, any tale is rather long in the telling — and this one is no exception. While Leonato, and the audience, listen with growing impatience, Dogberry rambles on with such pertinent observations as:

A good old man, sir; he will be talking:
as they say, When the age is in, the wit
is out. God help us! It is a world to see.
Well said, i' faith, neighbour Verges.
Well, God's a good man; an two men ride
of a horse, one must ride behind.
(36-40)

And just as they are finally getting around to Don John's treachery, the Messenger enters with the summons to Leonato — and off he goes. It is a very clever use of a minor character. (Neither the Quarto nor the Folio supply an entrance direction for the Messenger. Most editors insert one immediately preceding the Messenger's two lines — but I think that this is a mistake. He should enter some four or five lines earlier, just before Leonato says, "I am now in great haste, as it may appear unto you" (54-55). It may appear unto them because the Messenger is urgently tugging Leonato's sleeve to gain his attention.)

And, finally — in the last scene of Love's Labour's Lost, Mercade enters to the Princess: and this conversation takes place:

Mer. God save you, madam!
 Prin. Welcome, Mercade;
 But that thou interruptest our merriment.
 Mer. I am sorry, madam; for the news I bring
 Is heavy in my tongue. The King, your father —
 Prin. Dead, for my life!
 Mer. Even so; my tale is told.
 (V, ii, 723-729)

Here, the minor character not only causes the stage to be cleared (after a good deal of conversation), but he also brings the play to a close. Because of Mercade's message, the Princess and her ladies must return to France; and the King and his lords go off to spend twelve months in "some forlorn and naked hermitage." Of Mercade's entrance, Richard David, editor of the New Arden edition of Love's Labour's Lost, says:

Anyone who has seen Love's Labour's Lost acted will admit the powerful effect of Mercade's entrance in Act V, Scene ii, not only as a superb coup de théâtre but as setting up an ever present pressure of reality throughout the rest of the play until it fades out in bird-calls.⁴

I accept David's judgements only with reservations. To me, there is something rather contrived about Mercade's entrance and message (even though they are prepared for in I, i, 139); and it is notable that Shakespeare brings later plays to a more natural conclusion. Nor should the coup de théâtre blind us to the fact that the Princess's response to Mercade's news is

certainly most inadequate.⁵

The foregoing discussion will have shown the importance of the minor character to the staging of Shakespeare's plays. This importance becomes more evident when we take into consideration the peculiar features of the Elizabethan theatre. There was, of course, only a limited amount of scenery: the scenic effects possible in the theatres of today were quite beyond the Elizabethan stage. Consequently, such problems as the establishing of time and place, the creating of a suitable setting, and the interrelating of scenes had to be dealt with by the dramatist himself, within his text. Similarly, the absence of a curtain that could be rung down after each scene made it necessary for the dramatist to find some other way of indicating the passage of time and of getting people off the stage. (The alcove has a curtain, but the alcove could be used, at most, only for every second scene.) Very often, these things could be done through the introduction of minor characters. As I have demonstrated, quite a number of Shakespeare's minor characters are used in such a way — to meet the exigencies of staging.

Chapter II

MINOR CHARACTERS CONCERNED WITH ANOTHER CHARACTER

In this section are a number of minor characters who appear in the plays only to be of service to a major character. They identify him; they direct attention to him; they characterize him; and so forth.

(1) The Identification of Other Characters

Here, the minor character identifies a major character, usually by announcing him. A Serving-man in the Induction to The Taming of the Shrew, for instance, announces to the Lord:

An't please your honour, players
That offer service to your lordship.
(Ind., i, 77-78)

He thus identifies the Players, who enter immediately following his announcement. Similarly, a Messenger in I, i of Timon of Athens identifies Alcibiades:

Tim. What trumpet's that?
Mess. 'Tis Alcibiades, and some twenty horse,
All of companionship.
(249-251)

and a Gentlewoman in I, iii of Coriolanus identifies Lady Valeria:

Madam, the Lady Valeria is come to visit
you.
(28-29)

This minor character does not always announce someone, however. In As You Like It, I, i, this exchange takes place between Oliver and Dennis:

Oli. Holla, Dennis!
 Den. Calls your worship?
 Oli. Was not Charles, the Duke's wrestler, here to speak with me?
 Den. So please you, he is here at the door and importunes access to you.
 Oli. Call him in.
 (92-98)

Here, it is really Oliver who identifies the Duke's wrestler: but Dennis appears in the play only so that Oliver may do so. In the opening scene of the Second Part of Henry the Fourth, the Porter, in much the same way, helps to identify Lord Bardolph:

L. Bard. Who keeps the gate here, ho? Where is the Earl?
 Port. What shall I say you are?
 L. Bard. Tell thou the Earl
 That the Lord Bardolph doth attend him here.
 Port. His lordship is walk'd forth into the orchard.
 Please it your honour, knock but at the gate,
 And he himself will answer.
 (1-6)

Also in this category may be included the two Drawers in the Second Part of Henry the Fourth, II, iv. Talking together at the first of the scene, they tell us about the "excellent stratagem" of the Prince and Poins:

2. Draw. Sirrah, here will be the Prince and Master Poins anon; and they will put on two of our jerkins and aprons; and Sir John must not know of it. Bardolph hath brought word.

1.Draw. By the mass, here will be old utis; it
will be an excellent stratagem.
(16-22)

When the two supposed Drawers finally do enter, they have already been identified to us as Poins and the Prince.⁶

(2) The Directing of Attention to Other Characters

Here, the minor character is used chiefly to direct our attention toward a major character, although he may also identify him. This minor character serves much the same purpose as the spotlight of our modern stage. In the first scene of Titus Andronicus, for instance, the victorious Titus enters into Rome, fresh from his conquest of the Goths. Immediately before he comes on stage, a Captain rushes in and cries:

Romans, make way! The good Andronicus,
Patron of virtue, Rome's best champion,
Successful in the battles that he fights,
With honour and with fortune is return'd
From where he circumscribed with his sword
And brought to yoke the enemies of Rome.
(64-69)

Needless to say, we at once turn our gaze toward the entering Titus. It should be noticed, incidentally, that this Captain also characterizes Titus. Similarly, a Clerk, in IV, i of The Merchant of Venice, directs our attention to the entrance of the "young doctor of Rome":

"Your Grace shall understand
that at the receipt of your letter I am very sick; but
in the instant that your messenger came, in loving

visitation was with me a young doctor of Rome. His name is Balthazar. I acquainted him with the cause in controversy between the Jew and Antonio the merchant. We turned o'er many books together. He is furnished with my opinion; which, bett' red with his own learning, the greatness whereof I cannot enough commend, comes with him, at my importunity, to fill up your Grace's request in my stead. I beseech you, let his lack of years be no impediment to let him lack a reverend estimation; for I never knew so young a body with so old a head. I leave him to your gracious acceptance, whose trial shall better publish his commendation. "

(150-166)

This Clerk, too, serves a double purpose, since the letter he reads characterizes, as well as announces, the young Doctor.

In Hamlet, IV, v, we find two more minor characters used in this way. The first, a Gentleman, directs our attention to the entrance of Ophelia:

She speaks much of her father; says she hears
There's tricks i' th' world, and hems, and beats
her heart,
Spurns enviously at straws, speaks things in doubt
That carry but half sense. Her speech is nothing,
Yet the unshaped use of it doth move
The hearers to collection. They aim at it
And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts;
Which, as her winks and nods and gestures yield
them,
Indeed would make one think there would be thought,
Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily.

(4-13)

The second, a Messenger, prepares for the entrance of Laertes:

Save yourself, my lord!
The ocean, overpeering of his list,
Eats not the flats with more impetuous haste
Than young Laertes, in a riotous head,
O'erbears your officers. The rabble call him lord;

And, as the world were now but to begin,
 Antiquity forgot, custom not known,
 (The ratifiers and props of every word,)
 They cry, "Choose we! Laertes shall be king!"
 Caps, hands, and tongues applaud it to the clouds,
 "Laertes shall be king, Laertes king!"
 (98-108)

These two also describe interscene action and, in addition, characterize a major character. They are, therefore, not only a good deterrent to any belief in clear-cut classifications, but also a good indication of how useful — now necessary — a minor character can be.

In Timon of Athens, I, ii, a minor character, Cupid, directs our attention, not to a major character, but to a masque:

Hail to thee, worthy Timon, and to all
 That of his bounties taste! The five best senses
 Acknowledge thee their patron, and come freely
 To gratulate thy plenteous bosom. Th' ear,
 Taste, touch, and smell, pleas'd from thy table rise;
 They only now come but to feast thine eyes.
 (128-133)

And so in the Induction to The Taming of the Shrew, where a Messenger announces the play itself:

Your honour's players, hearing your amendment,
 Are come to play a pleasant comedy;
 For so your doctors hold it very meet,
 Seeing too much sadness hath congeal'd your blood,
 And melancholy is the nurse of frenzy.
 Therefore they thought it good you hear a play
 And frame your mind to mirth and merriment,
 Which bars a thousand harms and lengthens life.
 (Ind., ii, 131-138)

In A Midsummer-Night's Dream, V, i, Philostrate also

directs our attention to a play: but, rather interestingly, he does so by disparaging it:

A play there is, my lord, some ten words long,
Which is as brief as I have known a play;
But by ten words, my lord, it is too long,
Which makes it tedious; for in all the play
There is not one word apt, one player fitted.
And tragical, my noble lord, it is;
For Pyramus therein doth kill himself.
Which, when I saw rehears'd, I must confess,
Made mine eyes water; but more merry tears
The passion of loud laughter never shed.
(61-70)

We should notice that Philostrate serves another purpose too: he gives Theseus an opportunity to show his magnanimity:

I will hear that play;
For never anything can be amiss,
When simpleness and duty tender it.
Go, bring them in; and take your places, ladies.
(81-84)

One of the most clever variations of this technique is found in Coriolanus, I, vi. Here, a Messenger reports to Cominius that,

The citizens of Corioli have issued
And given to Lartius and to Marcius battle.
I saw our party to their trenches driven,
And then I came away.
(10-13)

Coriolanus, mantled in the blood of the Volscres, then appears. The Messenger, by reporting that Coriolanus was defeated, emphasizes his victorious entrance. This Messenger, incidentally, is telling the truth. As he explains:

Spies of the Volscres
Held me in chase, that I was forc'd to wheel
Three or four miles about, else had I, sir,

Half an hour since brought my report.
(18-21)

In the interim, the Romans have rallied and Corioli has been taken.

All of the minor characters discussed to this point have directed attention to an entrance. They do not always do so, however. In Coriolanus, II, i, the Roman army, victorious over the Volsces, returns to Rome:

A sennet. Trumpets sound. Enter Cominius
the General, and Titus Lartius; between them,
Coriolanus, crown'd with an oaken garland;
with Captains and Soldiers, and a Herald.
(178 sd.)

The Herald announces:

Know, Rome, that all alone Marcius did fight
Within Corioli gates; where he hath won,
With fame, a name to Caius Marcius; these
In honour follows Coriolanus.
Welcome to Rome, renowned Coriolanus!
(179-183)

The Herald is here used to single out Coriolanus from all the other characters on stage.

The final two minor characters to be discussed are perhaps concerned as much with dramatic effect as with a major character. They are the Sheriff in the opening scene of King John, and the Servant in IV, iv of The Winter's Tale. The Sheriff in King John actually says nothing aloud: he whispers to Essex,⁷ who then says to the King:

My liege, here is the strangest controversy
Come from the country to be judg'd by you

That e'er I heard. Shall I produce the men?
(44-46)

The King replies, "Let them approach" (47), and Robert Faulconbridge and the Bastard enter. The Sheriff does, of course, direct our attention to the entrance of Robert and Philip, but he also excites the interest of the audience. So does the Servant in The Winter's Tale, with his long description of Autolycus and his wares:

O master, if you did but hear the pedlar at the door, you would never dance again after a tabor and pipe; no, the bagpipe could not move you. He sings several tunes faster than you'll tell money. He utters them as he had eaten ballads and all men's ears grew to his tunes.
(IV, iv, 181-186)

All of the minor characters in this group arouse the interest of the audience to a certain extent: these two, however, are particularly notable in this respect.⁸

(3) The Characterization of Others

Since quite a number of minor characters fall into this category — characterizing a major figure — I have divided them into two groups. The first group includes those minor characters who directly characterize someone; and the second, those who indirectly characterize someone.

(i) Minors who Characterize Directly

The minor character tells us something about someone.

At the simplest level, we have the two Gentlemen of Pericles, III, ii, who appear in the play to inform us of Cerimon's skill as a doctor:

Your honour has through Ephesus pour'd forth
 Your charity, and hundreds call themselves
 Your creatures, who by you have been restor'd;
 And not your knowledge, your personal pain, but even
 Your purse, still open, hath built Lord Cerimon
 Such strong renown as time shall never raze.
 (43-48)

Immediately following these words, the Servants enter with the chest containing Marina. Similarly, the Page in Richard the Third tells us of Tyrrel's willingness to do anything for gold:

I know a discontented gentleman
 Whose humble means match not his haughty spirit.
 Gold were as good as twenty orators,
 And will, no doubt, tempt him to anything.
 (IV, ii, 36-39)

Or, this minor character can give us a more complete portrait: as Alexander does of Ajax in Troilus and Cressida:

This man, lady, hath robb'd many beasts of their
 particular additions: he is as valiant as the
 lion, churlish as the bear, slow as the elephant;
 a man into whom nature hath so crowded humours
 that his valour is crush'd into folly, his folly sauced
 with discretion. There is no man hath a virtue
 that he hath not a glimpse of, nor any man an attaint
 but he carries some stain of it. He is melancholy
 without cause, and merry against the hair. He
 hath the joints of everything, but everything so out
 of joint that he is a gouty Briareus, many hands and
 no use, or purblind Argus, all eyes and no sight.
 (I, ii, 19-31)

Similarly, a Lord in As You Like It, II, i, gives us a long description of the melancholy Jaques — some thirty-eight lines —

concluding with:

Thus most invectively he pierceth through
The body of the country, city, court,
Yea, and of this our life; swearing that we
Are mere usurpers, tyrants, and what's worse,
To fright the animals and to kill them up
In their assign'd and native dwelling-place.
(58-63)

A rather interesting example of this use of the minor character occurs in Macbeth, IV, iii. A Doctor enters to Malcolm and Macduff for no other reason but to say:

Ay, sir; there are a crew of wretched souls
That stay his cure. Their malady convinces
The great assay of art; but at his touch —
Such sanctity hath Heaven given his hand —
They presently amend.
(141-145)

Shakespeare is simply directing a compliment toward King James the First, who claimed a healing touch.

There is also another Doctor in Macbeth — who, unlike this first one, is rather important to the play. He and a Gentlewoman watch the sleepwalking Lady Macbeth; and he then makes this comment:

Foul whisp'rings are abroad; unnatural deeds
Do breed unnatural troubles; infected minds
To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets.
More needs she the divine than the physician.
God, God, forgive us all!
(V, i, 79-83)

His purpose is to point out to us that Lady Macbeth's madness is not a "natural" madness, but is caused by her guilt and remorse.⁹

The most extended use of this minor character is found in Cymbeline. Here, two lords trail Cloten about, the first flattering him, and the second giving us the truth about him in asides:

Clo. If my shirt were bloody, then to shift it.
Have I hurt him?
2. Lord. (Aside.) No, faith; not so much as his
patience.
1. Lord. Hurt him! His body's a passable carcass,
if he be not hurt; it is a throughfare for
steel, if it be not hurt.
2. Lord. (Aside.) His steel was in debt; it went
o' th' backside the town.
Clo. The villain would not stand me.
2. Lord. (Aside.) No; but he fled forward still,
toward your face.
1. Lord. Stand you! You have land enough of your
own, but he added to your having, gave you
some ground.
2. Lord. (Aside.) As many inches as you have
oceans. Puppies!
(I, ii, 6-22)

They also appear with him in II, i and II, iii, where they play the same roles as in I, ii.¹⁰

(ii) Minors who Characterize Indirectly

The minor character does not directly describe a major character, but is involved in some sort of incident with him. The major character is characterized either through his response to the minor character, or through the minor character's attitude to him. This indirect characterization, of course, is dramatically quite superior to the direct characterization already discussed.

In Richard the Third, we find two examples of this minor character: the third Messenger in IV, iv, and the Messenger in V, iii. In IV, iv, a first Messenger tells Richard:

My gracious sovereign, now in Devonshire,
As I by friends am well advertised,
Sir Edward Courtney, and the haughty prelate,
Bishop of Exeter, his elder brother,
With many moe confederates, are in arms.
(500-504)

and a second Messenger:

In Kent, my liege, the Guildfords are in arms;
And every hour more competitors
Flock to the rebels, and their power grows strong.
(505-507)

When the third Messenger enters, and begins, "My lord, the army of great Buckingham —" (508), Richard strikes him, taking it for granted that his news is bad:

Out on ye, owls! nothing but songs of death?
There, take thou that till thou bring better news.
(509-510)

This burst of temper obviously characterizes Richard: he is a tyrant, selfish and insecure, but lashing out at the world to conceal his weakness. The third Messenger, incidentally, has really brought good news:

. . . . By sudden floods and fall of waters
Buckingham's army is dispers'd and scatter'd;
And he himself wand'ring away alone,
No man knows whither.
(512-515)

Similarly, Richard's response to the Messenger in V, iii, also characterizes him. Just as Richard has concluded his oration

to his army, a Messenger tells him, of Lord Stanley:

My lord, he doth deny to come.
(343)

Richard replies,

Off with his son George's head!
(344)

This Messenger serves to give us a last reminder of Richard's selfish cruelty: Shakespeare has no intention of letting us be swayed by Richard's oration (even though it is largely name-calling).

In the First Part of Henry the Fourth, we find a rather clever use of this minor character. Hotspur and the other rebels are about to join battle with the King and his forces; Hotspur is saying:

Arm, arm with speed! and, fellows, soldiers,
friends,
Better consider what you have to do
Than I, that have not well the gift of tongue,
Can lift your blood up with persuasion.
(V, ii, 76-79)

At this point, a Messenger enters: "My lord, here are letters for you" (80). Hotspur brushes him aside, saying, "I cannot read them now" (81): and then launches into this speech:

O gentlemen, the time of life is short!
To spend that shortness basely were too long,
If life did ride upon a dial's point,
Still ending at the arrival of an hour.
An if we live, we live to tread on kings;
If die, brave death, when princes die with us!
Now, for our consciences, the arms are fair
When the intent of bearing them is just.
(82-89)

And once he has got started, it is necessary to cut him off with a second Messenger: "My lord, prepare; the King comes on apace" (90). Hotspur replies:

I thank him that he cuts me from my tale,
For I profess not talking; only this —
(91-92)

and manages to get in another nine lines before going off to battle.

Henry the Fifth reveals to us a number of these minor characters. Throughout this play, Shakespeare is concerned with demonstrating Henry's nobility, his compassion, his sense of duty: and he often uses minor characters for this purpose. In II, ii, for instance, Cambridge, Scroop, and Grey appear. They have, "for a few light crowns," sworn to kill Henry in Southampton. Shakespeare juxtaposes Henry's treatment of the man that railed against his person, and his treatment of Cambridge, Scroop, and Grey. Of the first, Henry says:

Uncle of Exeter,
Enlarge the man committed yesterday,
That rail'd against our person. We consider
It was excess of wine that set him on,
And on his more advice we pardon him.
(39-43)

But when he comes to pass judgement upon the three traitors, there is no mercy:

Get you therefore hence,
Poor miserable wretches, to your death,
The taste whereof God of his mercy give
You patience to endure, and true repentance
Of all your dear offences! Bear them hence.
(177-181)

The moral of the whole episode, Henry himself explains to us :

You have conspir'd against our royal person,
Join'd with an enemy proclaim'd, and from
his coffers
Receiv'd the golden earnest of our death;
Wherein you would have sold your king to slaughter,
His princes and his peers to servitude,
His subjects to oppression and contempt,
And his whole kingdom into desolation.
Touching our person seek we no revenge;
But we our kingdom's safety must so tender,
Whose ruin you have sought, that to her laws
We do deliver you.

(167-177)

Henry, as King of England, owes first duty to the realm: and he must be unswerving in his performance of that duty.

Cambridge, Scroop, and Grey are in the play only to demonstrate that thus and so Henry is. In themselves, we notice, they are quite unbelievable, as witness Grey's :

Never did faithful subject more rejoice
At the discovery of most dangerous treason
Than I do at this hour joy o'er myself,
Prevented from a damned enterprise.
My fault, but not my body, pardon, sovereign.

(161-165)

Similarly, Bates, Court, and Williams find a place in IV, i only to give Henry an opportunity to deliver, first, his speech about the responsibility of kings :

Every subject's duty is
the King's; but every subject's soul is his own.
Therefore should every soldier in the wars do as
every sick man in his bed, wash every mote out
of his conscience; and dying so, death is to him
advantage; or not dying, the time was blessedly
lost wherein such preparation was gained . . .

(185-191)

and, second, his soliloquy about the cares of kings:

The slave, a member of the country's peace,
 Enjoys it, but in gross brain little wots
 What watch the King keeps to maintain the peace,
 Whose hours the peasant best advantages.
 (298-301)

Erpingham, too, serves to characterize Henry:

K. Hen. Good morrow, old Sir Thomas Erpingham.
 A good soft pillow for that good white head
 Were better than a churlish turf of France.
 Erp. Not so, my liege; this lodging likes me better,
 Since I may say, "Now lie I like a king."
 (IV, i, 13-17)

This short exchange shows us Henry's consideration, and the esteem in which he is held by the nobles of the realm. The general admiration and loyalty accorded Henry are also exemplified by York, who says in IV, iii:

My lord, most humbly on my knee I beg
 The leading of the vaward.
 (129-130)

In addition, this Duke of York is one of the links that tie the four history plays — Richard the Second, the First and Second Parts of Henry the Fourth, and Henry the Fifth — together. He is Aumerle, of Richard the Second: whose treason was forgiven by Henry IV.

Just as Henry the Fifth insists upon the nobility of Henry, so too does Julius Caesar insist upon the nobility of Brutus. In II, i, Caius Ligarius, with his head bound up in a kerchief, enters to Brutus and says:



By all the gods that Romans bow before,
 I here discard my sickness! Soul of Rome!
 Brave son, deriv'd from honourable loins!
 Thou, like an exorcist, hast conjur'd up
 My mortified spirit. Now bid me run,
 And I will strive with things impossible;
 Yea, get the better of them. What's to do?
 (320-326)

Although Norman Nathan, in an article in Notes and Queries,¹¹ speaks of Ligarius as a standard to measure the other conspirators, I do not feel that there can really be any doubt about Shakespeare's intentions. Nathan fixes upon Ligarius' absence in the assassination scene and claims that Shakespeare is in this way pointing out the self-interest of the conspirators: Caius Ligarius is the only man with a just grievance against Caesar and yet does not help assassinate him. But Nathan is making too much out of too little. Ligarius probably does not appear in the assassination scene because the actor playing him is also playing someone else — the Soothsayer perhaps, or Lepidus, or Popilius. In any event, the audience would hardly note his absence from the throng of conspirators. Ligarius, then, emphasizes the fact that Brutus is a noble man. Indeed, he insists upon it:

I am not sick, if Brutus have in hand
 Any exploit worthy the name of honour.
 (316-317)

and,

Set on your foot,
 And with a heart new-fir'd I follow you,
 To do I know not what; but it sufficeth
 That Brutus leads me on.
 (331-334)

Publius, in III, i, is also used to characterize Brutus.

Following the slaying of Caesar, Brutus asks, "Where's Publius?" (85); and being told, says to him:

Publius, good cheer;
There is no harm intended to your person,
Nor to no Roman else. So tell them, Publius.
(89-91)

Brutus has conspired against Caesar "in a general honest thought/ And common good to all" (V, v, 71-72): he desires only Caesar's death.

Antony, too, is characterized by one of these minor characters — the Servant who delivers his message to Brutus:

Thus, Brutus, did my master bid me kneel,
Thus did Mark Antony bid me fall down;
And, being prostrate, thus he bade me say:
Brutus is noble, wise, valiant, and honest;
Caesar was mighty, bold, royal, and loving;
Say I love Brutus, and I honour him;
Say I fear'd Caesar, honour'd him, and lov'd him.
If Brutus will vouchsafe that Antony
May safely come to him, and be resolv'd
How Caesar hath deserv'd to lie in death,
Mark Antony shall not love Caesar dead
So well as Brutus living
(III, i, 123-134)

It is quite apparent that Antony is more concerned with assuring his own safety than with revenging Caesar's death. Brutus replies:

Tell him, so please him come unto this place,
He shall be satisfied; and, by my honour,
Depart untouch'd.
(140-142)

With this guarantee — and Brutus is an honourable man —

Antony feels quite safe in blustering:

I know not, gentlemen, what you intend,
 Who else must be let blood, who else is rank;
 If I myself, there is no hour so fit
 As Caesar's death's hour, nor no instrument
 Of half that worth as those your swords, made rich
 With the most noble blood of all this world.
 I do beseech ye, if you bear me hard,
 Now, whilst your purpled hands do reek and smoke,
 Fulfil your pleasure.
 (151-159)

In short, Antony is self-seeking, hypocritical. We see just how hypocritical he is when in IV, i, after using Caesar's will to inflame the mob, he says to Lepidus:

But, Lepidus, go you to Caesar's house;
 Fetch the will hither, and we shall determine
 How to cut off some charge in legacies.
 (7-9)

A Messenger in Hamlet, IV, vii, also deserves our attention. He enters to Claudius, with:

Letters, my lord, from Hamlet.
 This to your Majesty; this to the Queen.
 (36-37)

Claudius has sent Hamlet to his death; and now a Messenger delivers letters from him! Claudius replies, "From Hamlet!"; and then, scarcely ruffled, "Who brought them?" (38). A lesser man would have been quite shaken by the arrival of this Messenger: but Claudius — and here is an important point — is nothing if not courageous. Hamlet has often been termed irresolute: the truth of the matter is that he is pitted against a formidable adversary, who is usually one step ahead of him.

Another of these minor characters worth mentioning is the Messenger in IV, ii of King Lear. He is quite important to the characterization of Albany. Albany appears briefly in I, i, but we do not really learn anything of him until I, iv. There, Shakespeare makes quite clear to us that he is in no way a party to Goneril's scheming:

My lord, I am guiltless as I am ignorant
Of what hath moved you.
(295-296)

and,

How far your eyes may pierce I cannot tell.
Striving to better, oft we mar what's well.
(368-369)

We lose sight of him through the middle scenes of Lear's breakdown, but by Act IV it is necessary that we be prepared for his emergence as champion of the forces of right. In IV, ii, therefore, Oswald is made to say to Goneril:

I told him of the army that was landed;
He smil'd at it. I told him you were coming;
His answer was, "The worse." Of Gloucester's treachery,
And of the loyal service of his son,
When I inform'd him, then he call'd me sot,
And told me I had turn'd the wrong side out.
What most he should dislike seems pleasant to him;
What like, offensive.
(4-10)

But this much is not enough. Albany himself enters and reviles Goneril for her treatment of Lear:

Tigers, not daughters, what have you perform'd?
A father, and a gracious aged man,
Whose reverence even the head-lugg'd bear would lick,
Most barbarous, most degenerate! have you madded.
(40-43)

And to remove all possible doubt about Albany's true character, Shakespeare introduces a Messenger bearing news of the putting out of Gloucester's eyes, and Cornwall's death. Albany's response completes his characterization:

This shows you are above,
You justicers, that these our nether crimes
So speedily can venge!
(78-80)

and:

Gloucester, I live
To thank thee for the love thou show'dst the King,
And to revenge thine eyes.
(95-97)

In Timon of Athens, Shakespeare uses several of these minor characters — he is insisting upon Timon's generosity. There is, first, the Messenger from Ventidius:

. . . Five talents is his debt,
His means most short, his creditors most strait.
Your honourable letter he desires
To those have shut him up; which failing,
Periods his comfort.
(I, i, 95-99)

Timon pays the five talents. Directly thereafter, Lucilius — a servant to Timon — and an old Athenian are introduced. The Old Athenian tells Timon:

One only daughter have I, no kin else,
On whom I may confer what I have got.
The maid is fair, o' th' youngest for a bride,
And I have bred her at my dearest cost
In qualities of the best. This man of thine
Attempts her love. I prithee, noble lord,
Join with me to forbid him her resort;
Myself have spoke in vain.
(121-128)

But Timon confers upon Lucilius a sum equal to the daughter's dowry, whereupon all are satisfied. And, finally, the next scene gives us Ventidius:

Most honoured Timon,
It hath pleas'd the gods to remember my father's age,
And call him to long peace.
He is gone happy, and has left me rich.
Then, as in grateful virtue I am bound
To your free heart, I do return those talents,
Doubled with thanks and service, from whose help
I deriv'd liberty.

(I, ii, 1-8)

Timon, of course, refuses the money. Through these minor characters, then, Shakespeare has thoroughly convinced us of Timon's munificence.

In Antony and Cleopatra, we find Shakespeare's most skilled use of this minor character. A Messenger from Italy is introduced largely to characterize Cleopatra, in II, v and III, iii — both extremely fine scenes. Here is a portion of the first:

Mess. Free, madam? No; I made no such report.
He's bound unto Octavia.
Cleo. For what good turn?
Mess. For the best turn i' th' bed.
Cleo. I am pale, Charmian.
Mess. Madam, he's married to Octavia.
Cleo. The most infectious pestilence upon thee!
(Strikes him down.
Mess. Good madam, patience.
Cleo. What say you? Hence,
(Strikes him again.
Horrible villain! or I'll spurn thine eyes
Like balls before me; I'll unhair thy head.
(She hales him up and down.
Thou shalt be whipp'd with wire, and stew'd in
brine,
Smarting in ling'ring pickle.

Antony is amazed:

Can he be there in person? 'Tis impossible;
Strange that his power should be.
(57-58)

This surprise at Caesar's dispatch only emphasizes Antony's shortcomings. 12

(4) Straight Man.

Very often, a major character requires someone with whom to hold a conversation. If no one suitable is about, a minor character must be introduced who makes comments appropriate to the particular situation and then disappears. This category, then, deals with this minor character. I have dubbed ~~him~~ a "straight man".

As a first example, there is the Servant in Act V of Richard the Second, who is straight man to Exton:

Exton. Didst thou not mark the King, what words
 he spake,
 "Have I no friend will rid me of this living
 fear?"
 Was it not so?
Serv. These were his very words.
Exton. "Have I no friend?" quoth he. He spake it
 twice,
 And urg'd it twice together, did he not?
Serv. He did.
Exton. And speaking it, he wishtly look'd on me
 As who should say, "I would thou wert the man
 That would divorce this terror from my heart;"
 Meaning the King at Pomfret. Come, let's go.
 I am the King's friend, and will rid his foe.
 (V, iv, 1-11)

It is necessary that Exton tell the audience what he is about and why he is about it: and the Servant is therefore necessary so that this information may be cast into dramatic form. The same function is performed by Friar Thomas in Measure for Measure. Here, the Duke must inform the audience of the real reason for his absence from Vienna and the deputizing of Angelo. Friar Thomas simply listens for the better part of the scene, speaking only six lines. These six lines do nothing more than facilitate the Duke's account:

May your Grace speak of it?
(I, iii, 6)

Gladly, my lord.
(18)

and,

It rested in your Grace
To unloose this tied-up justice when you pleas'd:
And it in you more dreadful would have seem'd
Than in Lord Angelo.
(31-34)

Returning to Richard the Second, we find another of these minor characters, a Lady, in III, iv. She holds a conversation with the Queen:

Queen.	What sport shall we devise here in this garden To drive away the heavy thought of care?
Lady.	Madam, we'll play at bowls.
Queen.	'Twill make me think the world is full of rubs, And that my fortune runs against the bias.
Lady.	Madam, we'll dance.
Queen.	My legs can keep no measure in delight, When my poor heart no measure keeps in grief; Therefore, no dancing, girl; some other sport.
Lady.	Madam, we'll tell tales.

Queen. Of sorrow or of joy?
 Lady. Of either, madam.
 Queen. Of neither, girl;
 For if of joy, being altogether wanting,
 It doth remember me the more of sorrow;
 Or if of grief, being altogether had,
 It adds more sorrow to my want of joy . . .
 (1-16)

Through this conversation, the Queen communicates to us, not information, but her feelings, her state of mind. Similarly, the Host in Two Gentlemen of Verona plays straight man to Julia: and the exchange between them reveals Julia's emotions:

Host. How now! are you sadder than you were before? How do you, man? The music likes you not.
 Jul. You mistake; the musician likes me not.
 Host. Why, my pretty youth?
 Jul. He plays false, father.
 Host. How? Out of tune on the strings?
 Jul. Not so; but yet so false that he grieves my very heart-strings.
 Host. You have a quick ear.
 Jul. Ay, I would I were deaf; it makes me have a slow heart.
 Host. I perceive you delight not in music.
 Jul. Not a whit, when it jars so.
 Host. Hark, what fine change is in the music!
 Jul. Ay, that change is the spite.
 Host. You would have them always play but one thing?
 Jul. I would always have one play but one thing.
 (IV, ii, 54-72)

And, thirdly, the straight man can serve purely comic purposes, as does Francis in the First Part of Henry the Fourth:

Prince. But, Francis, darest thou be so valiant as to play the coward with thy indenture and show it a fair pair of heels and run from it?
 Fran. O Lord, sir, I'll be sworn upon all the books in England, I could find in my heart --

Poins. (Within.) Francis!
 Fran. Anon, sir.
 Prince. How old art thou, Francis?
 Fran. Let me see — about Michaelmas next I shall be —
 Poins. (Within.) Francis!
 Fran. Anon, sir. Pray you, stay a little, my lord.
 Prince. Nay, but hark you, Francis: for the sugar thou gavest me, 'twas a pennyworth, was't not?
 Fran. O Lord, I would it had been two!
 Prince. I will give thee for it a thousand pound. Ask me when thou wilt, and thou shalt have it.
 Poins. (Within.) Francis!
 Fran. Anon, anon.
 Prince. Anon, Francis? No, Francis; but tomorrow, Francis; or Francis, o' Thursday; or indeed, Francis, when thou wilt.
 (II, iv, 51-75)

And so forth. Francis, really, is the Elizabethan zany: he appears in the scene only to permit the Prince to make humorous remarks. Much the same role is initially played by Silence in the Second Part of Henry the Fourth. We first see him in III, ii, where he is straight man to Shallow:

Shal. I was once of Clement's Inn, where I think they will talk of mad Shallow yet.
 Sil. You were call'd lusty Shallow then, cousin.
 Shal. By the mass, I was call'd anything; and I would have done anything indeed too, and roundly too. There was I, and little John Doit of Staffordshire, and black George Barnes . . .
 (15-21)

Once Falstaff has entered, he has served his purpose, and we hear no more of him throughout the scene — except for an interjected, "That's fifty-five year ago" (224). But when Shakespeare reaches V, iii and brings on Shallow again,

inspiration suddenly strikes him. Silence is also introduced, in a rather tipsy condition; he is hardly on stage before he bursts into song:

Ah, sirrah! quoth-a, we shall
 (Singing.)
 "Do nothing but eat, and make good cheer,
 And praise God for the merry year,
 When flesh is cheap and females dear,
 And lusty lads roam here and there
 So merrily,
 And ever among so merrily."
 (18-23)

And so throughout the scene. With every bumper of wine there comes another burst of song:

"A cup of wine that's brisk and fine,
 And drink unto the leman mine;
 And a merry heart lives long-a."
 (48-50)

and,

"Fill the cup, and let it come;
 I'll pledge you a mile to the bottom."
 (56-57)

Shakespeare is here using Silence's taciturnity in III, ii — which was unavoidable, since he had served his purpose and there was nothing more for him to do — for dramatic effect: that is, to contrast with the lyric outpourings in V, iii. It is a very clever use of minor character.

And, finally, two minor characters who are very much alike: the French Soldier in Henry the Fifth, and Colville in the Second Part of Henry the Fourth. The French Soldier encounters Pistol on the battle field, and is quite subdued by "this

roaring devil i' th' old play " who declares :

Moy shall not serve; I will have forty moys,
Or I will fetch thy rim out at thy throat
In drops of crimson blood.
(IV, iv, 14-16)

The Frenchman consequently yields himself, as he thinks, to
"le plus brave, vaillant, et tres distingue seigneur d'Angleterre"
(60-61). But the Boy tells us the truth of the matter :

I did never know so
full a voice issue from so empty a heart;
but the saying is true, "The empty vessel
makes the greatest sound."
(71-74)

Similarly, Colville meets Falstaff on the battlefield. Falstaff,
we must remember, has acquired quite a reputation as a soldier
through his military exploits in the First Part of Henry the
Fourth. As the Chief Justice remarks,

Well, I am loath to gall a new-heal'd
wound. Your day's service at Shrewsbury
hath a little gilded over your night's exploit
on Gadshill.
(2H4, I, ii, 167-169)

Colville therefore replies to Falstaff's

Do
ye yield, sir? or shall I sweat for you?
(IV, iii, 11-12)

with :

I think you are Sir John Falstaff, and in
that thought yield me.
(16-17)

Now this episode with Colville no more demonstrates Falstaff's
valor than the episode with the French Soldier demonstrates

Pistol's valor. Falstaff's reputation, after all, derives from his sticking the dead Hotspur in the thigh — from a safe distance.

Falstaff blusters to Lancaster:

I have
speeded hither with the very extremest inch
of possibility; I have found¹red ninescore and
odd posts; and here, travel-tainted as I am,
have, in my pure and immaculate valour,
taken Sir John Colville of the Dale, a most
furious knight and valorous enemy. But what
of that? He saw me, and yielded; that I may
justly say, with the hook-nos'd fellow of Rome,
"I came, saw, and overcame."

(37-45)

But Lancaster gives us a more accurate summing up:

It was more of his courtesy than your deserv-
ing.¹³

(47-48)

(5) Foil

The minor character serves as a foil to a major character — that is, he contrasts markedly with, and thereby sets off, the major character. In the opening scene of King John, for instance, Robert Faulconbridge and Philip the Bastard enter. Philip, it turns out, is the bastard son of Richard the Lion-hearted: Queen Eleanor notices the resemblance at once:

He hath a trick of Coeur-de-lion's face;
The accent of his tongue affecteth him.
Do you not read some tokens of my son
In the large composition of this man?

(85-88)

King John agrees:

Mine eye hath well examined his parts
And finds them perfect Richard.
(89-90)

Philip, then, as bastard son to Richard and the real protagonist of the play, must be made to stand out. Thomas Pope evidently played the part, and Pope was a big man;¹⁴ but Shakespeare was not satisfied with his size alone. He therefore introduces Richard Cowley as Robert Faulconbridge.¹⁵ Philip gives us a good description of him:

Madam, an if my brother had my shape
And I had his, Sir Robert's his, like him;
And if my legs were two such riding-rods,
My arms such eel-skins stuff'd, my face so thin
That in mine ear I durst not stick a rose
Lest men should say, Look, where three-farthings
goes . . . !
(138-143)

How much more impressive must Philip seem, then, when placed beside such a gaunt figure.

Similarly, I think, Peter acts as foil to the Nurse in Romeo and Juliet, II, iv. Peter was played by Will Kemp,¹⁶ who, in other roles, is described as the "genius of famine" (2H4, III, ii, 337), "a man made after supper of a cheese-paring" (2H4, III, ii, 332), a "three-inch fool" (TofS, IV, i, 27). (Kemp also played Costard in Love's Labour's Lost: Baldwin remarks, "On the other hand, Costard 'because of his great limb, or joint, shall pass Pompey the Great.'"¹⁷ Baldwin concludes that Kemp "was not tall but of large joint." However, Holofernes' remark about Costard is more probably

meant as an obvious, and therefore humorous, misconstruing.)

The Nurse, on the other hand, was presumably played by Nicholas Tooley: according to Baldwin, a "small, muscular, round-faced" man.¹⁸ Playing the part of a knight in The Two Noble Kinsmen, he is thus described:

A little man, but of a tough soul, seeming
As great as any

and,

He's white-hair'd,
Not wanton-white, but such a manly colour
Next to an auburn; tough, and nimble set,
Which shews an active soul; his arms are brawny,
Lined with strong sinews; to the shoulder-piece
Gently they swell, like women new-conceived,
Which speaks him prone to labour, never fainting
Under the weight of arms¹⁹

He is, then, a fairly stocky man: as a woman, he would certainly not be daintily feminine. And, no doubt, he was well-padded for his role as the Nurse. We have, then, the rather ludicrous picture of this very hefty Nurse, probably more than a match for most men, escorted by the diminutive Peter, who might be thrust with "all his apparel into an eel-skin" (2H4, III, ii, 349-350). The incongruity of the Nurse's remark to Peter — "And thou must stand by too, and suffer every knave to use me at his pleasure" (II, iv, 162-164) — is immediately apparent.

In Pericles, Prince of Tyre, two Lords serve, in a somewhat different way, as foils to Helicanus. The two Lords greet Pericles in I, ii, as follows:

France, however, is made of better metal:

Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich being poor,
Most choice forsaken, and most lov'd despis'd!
Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon,
Be it lawful I take up what's cast away.
Gods, gods! 'tis strange that from their cold'st
neglect
My love should kindle to inflam'd respect.
Thy dowerless daughter, king, thrown to my
chance,
Is queen of us, of ours, and our fair France.
Not all the dukes of waterish Burgundy
Can buy this unpriz'd precious maid of me.
Bid them farewell, Cordelia, though unkind;
Thou lovest here, a better where to find.
(253-264)

The entire incident serves to direct our sympathies toward Cordelia.

As Burgundy is foil to France in King Lear, the Widow is foil to Katherina in The Taming of the Shrew: but here the purpose served is that of emphasizing the moral of the play. In the opening scene, Katherina is a shrew; in the final scene, she is an obedient wife. Shakespeare shows us just how obedient she is by introducing the Widow, Hortensio's newly-acquired wife. She and Katherina soon have a disagreement:

Kath. "He that is giddy thinks the world turns round:"
I pray you, tell me what you meant by that.
Wid. Your husband, being troubled with a shrew,
Measures my husband's sorrow by his woe:
And now you know my meaning.
Kath. A very mean meaning.
Wid. Right, I mean you.
Kath. And I am mean indeed, respecting you.
(V, ii, 26-32)

Further on in the scene, the Widow and Bianca ignore the commandments of their husbands, while Katherina obeys that of

Petruchio — prompting Baptista's,

Now, fair befall thee, good Petruchio!
The wager thou hast won; and I will add
Unto their losses twenty thousand crowns,
Another dowry to another daughter,
For she is chang'd, as she had never been.
(111-115)

And, finally, the Widow scoffs at Katherina's perfect obedience:

Lord, let me never have cause to sigh,
Till I be brought to such a silly pass!
(123-124)

giving Katherina occasion to set forth the true duty of a wife

(having been requested to do so by Petruchio, of course):

Such duty as the subject owes the prince
Even such a woman oweth to her husband;
And when she is froward, peevish, sullen, sour,
And not obedient to his honest will,
What is she but a foul contending rebel
And graceless traitor to her loving lord?
I am asham'd that women are so simple
To offer war where they should kneel for peace,
Or seek for rule, supremacy, and sway,
When they are bound to serve, love, and obey.
(155-164)

There is one more minor character in Shakespeare's plays who serves as a foil: and though he has a larger part than the other minor characters here discussed (he appears in seven scenes), he is too fine an example to be ignored. He is, of course, Falstaff's Page, in the Second Part of Henry the Fourth. He was no doubt played by the smallest apprentice in the company, the better to contrast with Falstaff; and Falstaff himself gives us a description of the two of them together:

I do here walk before thee

like a sow that hath overwhelm'd all her
 litter but one. If the Prince put thee into
 my service for any other reason than to
 set me off, why then I have no judgement.
 Thou whoreson mandrake, thou art fitter
 to be worn in my cap than to wait at my
 heels. I was never mann'd with an agate
 till now; but I will inset you neither in
 gold nor silver, but in vile apparel, and
 send you back again to your master, for
 a jewel

(I, ii, 12-21)

(6) The Directing of Sympathies

In Titus Anronicus, III, i, a Messenger, "with two heads
 and a hand, " enters to Titus and says:

Worthy Andronicus, ill art thou repaid
 For that good hand thou sent'st the Emperor.
 Here are the heads of thy two noble sons;
 And here's thy hand, in scorn to thee sent back,--
 Thy grief their sports, thy resolution mock'd,
 That woe is me to think upon thy woes
 More than remembrance of my father's death.
 (235-241)

This Messenger forwards the action: but he also directs our
 sympathies toward Titus. (It is, of course, scarcely necessary
 that he do so.) The minor character in this category performs
 just such a function.

A more subtle use of this minor character is found in
Richard the Second, V, v. Richard has lost his crown and is
 in prison. A Groom of the Stable enters and salutes him:
 "Hail, royal prince!" (67); and then explains:

I was a poor groom of thy stable, King,

When thou wert king; who, travelling towards
 York,
 With much ado at length have gotten leave
 To look upon my sometimes royal master's
 face.

O, how it yearn'd my heart when I beheld
 In London streets, that coronation-day,
 When Bolingbroke rode on roan Barbary,
 That horse that thou so often hast bestrid,
 That horse that I so carefully have dress'd!
 (72-80)

Richard's reply is very human:

Rode he on Barbary? Tell me, gentle friend,
 How went he under him?
 (81-82)

Later in the scene, when Richard is struck down by Exton, we view the deed as an injustice: the Groom has helped to transfer our sympathies from Bolingbroke to Richard. Bolingbroke's final judgement, his summing up of his part of the play, therefore rings true:

The guilt of conscience take thou for thy labour,
 But neither my good word nor princely favour.
 With Cain go wander through the shades of night,
 And never show thy head by day nor light.
 Lords, I protest, my soul is full of woe
 That blood should sprinkle me to make me grow.
 Come, mourn with me for what I do lament,
 And put on sullen black incontinent.
 I'll make a voyage to the Holy Land,
 To wash this blood off from my guilty hand.
 March sadly after; grace my mournings here
 In weeping after this untimely bier.
 (V, vi, 41-52)

In much the same way, a Soldier in Antony and Cleopatra, IV, vi, directs our sympathies toward Antony. So far in the play, Antony has done little more than demonstrate that his

"captain's heart" has, indeed, become "the bellows and the fan/
To cool a gypsy's lust" (I, i, 9-10). Enobarbus, therefore,
has deserted to Caesar. He is condemning himself for his
revolt when a Soldier enters and announces to him:

Enobarbus, Antony
Hath after thee sent all thy treasure, with
His bounty overplus. The messenger
Came on my guard, and at thy tent is now
Unloading of his mules.
(20-24)

Enobarbus says, "I give it you" (24), and the Soldier replies:

Mock not, Enobarbus;
I tell you true. Best you saf'd the bringer
Out of the host; I must attend mine office,
Or would have done 't myself. Your emperor
Continues still a Jove.
(25-29)

"Your emperor/ Continues still a Jove": and Enobarbus is
conscience-stricken:

O Antony,
Thou mine of bounty, how wouldst thou have paid
My better service, when my turpitude
Thou dost so crown with gold! This blows my
heart.
If swift thought break it not, a swifter means
Shall outstrike thought; but thought will do't,
I feel.
I fight against thee! No! I will go seek
Some ditch wherein to die; the foul'st best fits
My latter part of life.
(31-39)

Shakespeare's purpose is to restore to Antony some portion of
his former glory; we must see his nobility, or his death will
affect us not at all. The essence of tragedy is unrealized great-
ness. So far, we have seen none of this greatness in Antony —

and it is time we did. It is for this reason that the Soldier is introduced: and it is for this reason that Antony suddenly begins to speak some of the most magnificent poetry in the play:

I am dying, Egypt, dying.
(IV, xv, 41)

And so in Julius Caesar, V, v, where Shakespeare ensures that our sympathies are with Brutus. Brutus asks first Clitus, then Dardanius, and then Volumnius to kill him: they all refuse. Here is part of the exchange:

Bru. Sit thee down, Clitus; slaying is the word,
It is a deed in fashion. Hark thee, Clitus.
Cli. What, I, my lord? No, not for all the world.
Bru. Peace then! no words.
Cli. I'll rather kill myself.
Bru. Hark thee, Dardanius.
Dar. Shall I do such a deed?
Cli. O Dardanius!
Dar. O Clitus!
Cli. What ill request did Brutus make to thee?
Dar. To kill him, Clitus. Look, he meditates.
Cli. Now is that noble vessel full of grief,
That it runs over even at his eyes.
(4-14)

Brutus is the only honourable man in the play: and Shakespeare is taking no chances of our forgetting the fact.

Another example of this use of the minor character is found in Macbeth, IV, ii. It is the scene of the murder of Lady Macduff and her son. As far as the action is concerned, the scene is unnecessary: Ross, in IV, iii, tells Macduff, and us, that his wife and children are "well at peace." But Shakespeare does show us the scene — and it is a very moving one.

Shakespeare's purpose is clear: from this point on, we are no longer in sympathy with Macbeth. We should notice, in this scene, the young son's courage; it is a fine touch. The murderers enter, and one of them calls Macduff a traitor. The Son retorts:

Thou liest, thou shag-ear'd villain!
(83)

and is stabbed. Dying, he says:

He has kill'd me, mother:
Run away, I pray you!
(84-85)

And, finally, there is Salerio in The Merchant of Venice, III, ii. He delivers a letter from Antonio to Bassanio and, in addition, informs Bassanio:

Besides, it should appear, that if he had
The present money to discharge the Jew,
He would not take it. Never did I know
A creature that did bear the shape of man
So keen and greedy to confound a man.
He plies the Duke at morning and at night,
And doth impeach the freedom of the state,
If they deny him justice. Twenty merchants,
The Duke himself, and the magnificoes
Of greatest port, have all persuaded with him;
But none can drive him from the envious plea
Of forfeiture, of justice, and his bond.
(275-286)

By telling us of Shylock's "envious" implacability, he directs our sympathies toward Antonio. It is, however, debatable whether Salerio should be considered a minor character at all. J. R. Brown, following Dover Wilson, has this to say:

Solanio is regular in Q1, except for the entries

at I. i and II. iv, and a speech prefix at I. i. 15, where "Salanio" (an easy misreading) is found. Salerio is authenticated in the verse dialogue and stage direction of III. ii, and in the speech prefixes of IV. i. 15 and 107. Salerio in III. ii is a "messenger from Venice" and the knowledge he shows of Antonio's affairs suggests that he is identical with "Salarino" or "Salerino" of earlier stage directions and "Salari" and "Saleri" of some speech prefixes. Possibly the compositors (or a scribe, as Prof. Wilson thought) expanded Shakespeare's "Salario" or "Salerio" mistaking the dot of an i for a mark of abbreviation. Or, perhaps, Shakespeare modified the name when he had occasion to use it in verse. In either case it is simplest to regularize as Salerio.

(Merch, New Arden, pp. 2-3)

The introduction of a new character in III, ii (Salerio) certainly seems rather wasteful when Salarino and Solanio are already about: and the reading of "Salerio" for "Salarino" throughout is probably the best solution of the difficulty.

(7) The Occasioning of a Speech, Action

In Measure for Measure, II, iv, a Servant enters to Angelo and says, "One Isabel, a sister, desires access to you" (18). Though this Servant may, at first glance, seem merely to announce Isabel, he really serves a more important purpose — he occasions Angelo's soliloquy:

O heavens!
Why does my blood thus muster to my heart,
Making both it unable for itself,
And dispossessing all my other parts
Of necessary fitness?
So play the foolish throngs with one that swoonds;
Come all to help him, and so stop the air

By which he should revive; and even so
 The general, subject to a well-wish'd king,
 Quit their own part, and in obsequious fondness
 Crowd to his presence, where their untaught love
 Must needs appear offence.
 (19-30)

In the same way, a Servant in The Winter's Tale, V, i, announces the entrance of Perdita and Florizel:

One that gives out himself Prince Florizel,
 Son of Polixenes, with his princess, she
 The fairest I have yet beheld, desires access
 To your high presence.
 (85-88)

and prompts Paulina's eulogy of Hermione:

O Hermione,
 As every present time doth boast itself
 Above a better gone, so must thy grave
 Give way to what's seen now! Sir, you yourself
 Have said and writ so, but your writing now
 Is colder than that theme, "She had not been,
 Nor was not to be equall'd;" — thus your verse
 Flow'd with her beauty once.
 (95-102)

Paulina, obviously, is not letting Leontes forget Hermione: and neither is Shakespeare letting us forget Hermione. And in IV, iii of Henry the Fifth, Montjoy, by asking Henry if he will "compound" for his ransom, occasions this speech:

Let me speak proudly: tell the Constable
 We are but warriors for the working-day.
 Our gayness and our gilt are all besmirch'd
 With rainy marching in the painful field;
 There's not a piece of feather in our host —
 Good argument, I hope, we will not fly —
 And time hath worn us into slovenry;
 But, by the mass, our hearts are in the trim;
 And my poor soldiers tell me, yet ere night
 They'll be in fresher robes, or they will pluck
 The gay new coats o'er the French soldiers' heads

...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...

...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...

...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...

...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...

...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...

And turn them out of service. If they do this —
 As, if God please, they shall, — my ransom then
 Will soon be levied. Herald, save thou thy labour.
 Come thou no more for ransom, gentle herald.
 (108-122)

We find a rather similar use of a minor character in
Cymbeline, I, iv — where a Frenchman says of Posthumus:

It was much like an argument that
 fell out last night, where each of us fell in praise
 of our country-mistresses; this gentleman at that
 time vouching — and upon warrant of bloody affir-
 mation — his to be more fair, virtuous, wise,
 chaste, constant, qualified, and less attemptable
 than any the rarest of our ladies in France.
 (60-66)

His purpose in the play is to introduce this subject of "the most
 virtuous lady," so that Iachimo can propose,

I will lay you ten thousand ducats
 to your ring that, commend me to the court where
 your lady is, with no more advantage than the
 opportunity of a second conference, and I will
 bring from thence that honour of hers which you
 imagine so reserv'd.
 (138-143)

Finally, in Julius Caesar, V, iv, young Cato replies to
 Brutus', "Yet, countrymen, O, yet hold up your heads!" (1),
 with:

What bastard doth not? Who will go with me?
 I will proclaim my name about the field.
 I am the son of Marcus Cato, ho!
 A foe to tyrants, and my country's friend;
 I am the son of Marcus Cato, ho!
 (2-6)

He serves primarily as example to Lucilius, who, following his
 lead, cries out:

And I am Brutus, Marcus Brutus, I;
 Brutus, my country's friend; know me for Brutus!
 (7-8)

and then yields himself to the enemy:

Only I yield to die:
 There is so much that thou wilt kill me straight;
 Kill Brutus, and be honour'd in his death.
 (12-14)

His purpose is simple enough: he wishes to give Brutus time
 either to escape or to take his life:

I dare assure thee that no enemy
 Shall ever take alive the noble Brutus;
 The gods defend him from so great a shame!
 When you do find him, or alive or dead,
 He will be found like Brutus, like himself.
 (21-25)

Macmillan,²⁰ incidentally, was surely right in giving lines 7
 and 8 to Lucilius rather than to Brutus. Cato, otherwise, serves
 no discernible function. We should notice, too, that North's
Plutarch treats as two separate incidents the death of young
 Cato and the impersonation of Brutus by Lucilius: Shakespeare
 must have had some reason for juxtaposing them.²¹

Shakespeare's major characters have long received a
 good deal of attention from critics: and rightly so: for, with
 very few exceptions, they seem real and vitally alive to us. But
 while everyone agrees that Shakespeare is supreme insofar as
 character delineation is concerned, no one seems to have analyzed
 the technique behind this delineation. A good part of it, I think,
 depends upon minor characters. We see King Henry's magna-

nimity, for instance, largely through his response to other people, to situations involving other people -- and these other people are usually minor characters introduced for this sole purpose. And so with many other major characters. Timon is generous, Richard is tyrannical, Claudio is courageous, Lady Macbeth is guilt-ridden, Philip is manly: all these things are communicated to us through minor characters. And so while we are exclaiming about Shakespeare's great major characters, let us not forget about his humble minors. They are the ones, after all, who help to make the major characters great.

Chapter III

MINOR CHARACTERS CONCERNED WITH DRAMATIC EFFECT

The minor characters discussed in this chapter increase the dramatic effectiveness of the plays. That is, they contribute certain dramatic values — such as irony, contrast, and emphasis.

(1) Irony

In Measure for Measure, IV, ii, a Messenger enters with a note from Angelo, and says to the Provost:

My lord hath sent
you this note; and by me this further charge,
that you swerve not from the smallest article
of it, neither in time, matter, or other
circumstance.

(105-108)

Angelo has condemned Claudio to death for seducing Juliet, and has subsequently himself attempted to seduce Isabella — the disguised Duke, aware of Angelo's offence, is therefore moved to comment in an aside:

This is his pardon, purchas'd by such sin
For which the pardoner himself is in.
Hence hath offence his quick celerity,
When it is borne in high authority.
When vice makes mercy, mercy's so extended,
That for the fault's love is the offender friended.

(111-116)

The note, however, reads:

"Whatsoever you may hear to the contrary, let Claudio be executed by four of the clock; and in the afternoon Barnardine. For my better satisfaction, let me have Claudio's head sent me by five. Let this be duly performed, with a thought that more depends on it than we must yet deliver. Thus fail not to do your office, as you will answer it at your peril."

(123-130)

The irony is apparent: and it emphasizes Angelo's depravity.

Another example of this use of a minor character is found in Richard the Third, III, ii. In the preceding scene, Buckingham has asked Richard:

Now, my lord, what shall we do if we perceive
Lord Hastings will not yield to our complots?

(191-192)

and received the forthright reply: "Chop off his head" (193).

Hastings, now, is proceeding to the Tower of London to meet with Richard and Buckingham; and has already told us:

But, that I'll give my voice on Richard's side,
To bar my master's heirs in true descent,
God knows I will not do it, to the death.

(III, ii, 53-55)

We know, then, that he is going to his death. But Hastings himself does not: and meeting with a Pursuivant, he exchanges these words with him:

Hast. How now, sirrah! how goes the world with thee?

Purs. The better that your lordship please to ask.

Hast. I tell thee, man, 'tis better with me now
Than when thou met'st me last where now
we meet.

Then was I going prisoner to the Tower
By the suggestion of the Queen's allies;
But now, I tell thee — keep it to thyself —

This day those enemies are put to death,
And I in better state than e'er I was.
Purs. God hold it, to your honour's good content!
Hast. Gramercy, fellow. There, drink that for
me.

(98-108)

A Priest then enters, and greets Hastings with, "Well met, my lord; I am glad to see your honour" (110). Hastings replies:

I thank thee, good Sir John, with all my heart.
I am in your debt for your last exercise;
Come the next Sabbath, and I will content you.
(111-113)

The next Sabbath will never come for Hastings. The irony makes more horrible Richard's unnatural deeds; and it looks forward to Othello's, "Honest, honest Iago".

In Coriolanus, too, we come across minor characters concerned with dramatic irony. These are to be expected, since Coriolanus is a play of ironies. Coriolanus has been banished from Rome largely through the efforts of Brutus and Sicinius; but he has compacted with Aufidius, and now marches to destroy Rome. In IV, vi, Brutus and Sicinius meet three or four Citizens:

Cit's. The gods preserve you both!
Sic. God-den, our
neighbours.
Bru. God-den to you all, god-den to you all.
1. Cit. Ourselves, our wives, and children, on
our knees,
Are bound to pray for you both.
Sic. Live, and thrive!
Bru. Farewell, kind neighbours! We wish'd
Coriolanus

Had lov'd you as we did.
 Cit's. Now the gods keep you!
 (19-25)

About ten lines later, an Aedile enters and reports:

Worthy tribunes,
 There is a slave, whom we have put in prison,
 Reports the Volscres with two several powers
 Are ent'red in the Roman territories,
 And with the deepest malice of the war
 Destroy what lies before 'em.
 (37-42)

Brutus and Sicinius refuse to believe him:

Bru. Go see this rumourer whipp'd. It
 cannot be
 The Volscres dare break with us.
 (47-48)

The report, however, is confirmed. A troop of Citizens now enters:

1. Cit. For mine own part,
 When I said banish him, I said 'twas pity.
 2. Cit. And so did I.
 3. Cit. And so did I; and, to say the truth, so did
 very many of us. That we did, we did
 for the best; and though we willingly con-
 sented to his banishment, yet it was
 against our will.
 (139-146)

The final irony comes in V, iv, when a Messenger warns Sicinius:

Sir, if you'd save your life, fly to your house.
 The plebeians have got your fellow-tribune
 And hale him up and down, all swearing, if
 The Roman ladies bring not comfort home,
 They'll give him death by inches.
 (38-42)

The play abounds in the terrible relativity of opinions and actions:
 and the irony stresses this relativity.

(2) Suspense

Strangely enough, the only minor characters used to create suspense are found in Julius Caesar. (A Messenger in II, ix of The Merchant of Venice might be said to create suspense — but to me, his function seems to be more one of interrelating scenes.) There is, first, the Servant in II, ii, who delivers the verdict of the augurers to Caesar:

They would not have you to stir forth to-day.
Plucking the entrails of an offering forth,
They could not find a heart within the beast.
(38-40)

Calpurnia has already urged Caesar to remain at home: but Caesar has refused:

Yet Caesar shall go forth; for these predictions
Are to the world in general as to Caesar.
(28-29)

Now, supported by the augurers, she resumes her pleading, and Caesar yields to her:

Mark Antony shall say I am not well;
And, for thy humour, I will stay at home.
(55-56)

But Decius Brutus enters and re-interprets Calpurnia's dream; and adds:

The Senate have concluded
To give this day a crown to mighty Caesar.
If you shall send them word you will not come,
Their minds may change. Besides, it were a mock
Apt to be render'd, for some one to say,
"Break up the Senate till another time,
When Caesar's wife shall meet with better dreams."
If Caesar hide himself, shall they not whisper,
"Lo, Caesar is afraid"?
(93-101)

And Caesar changes his mind once more. The audience, throughout the whole episode, is thinking, "Will he or won't he?"

Caesar goes off to the Senate House, and the next scene — II, iii — presents us with Artemidorus. He reads a paper to himself:

"Caesar, beware of Brutus; take heed of
Cassius; come not near Casca; have an eye to
Cinna; trust not Trebonius; mark well Metellus
Cimber: Decius Brutus loves thee not: thou hast
wrong'd Caius Ligarius. There is but one mind
in all these men, and it is bent against Caesar.
If thou beest not immortal, look about you; secur-
ity gives way to conspiracy. The mighty gods
defend thee! Thy lover,

ARTEMIDORUS."

(1-10)

and then tells us:

Here will I stand till Caesar pass along,
And as a suitor will I give him this.
My heart laments that virtue cannot live
Out of the teeth of emulation.
If thou read this, O Caesar, thou mayst live;
If not, the Fates with traitors do contrive.

(11-16)

Hardly has he made an exit, than the Soothsayer enters, and exchanges these words with Portia:

Por. Thou hast some suit to Caesar, hast thou not?

Sooth. That I have, lady; if it will please Caesar
To be so good to Caesar as to hear me,
I shall beseech him to befriend himself.

Por. Why, know'st thou any harm's intended
towards him?

Sooth. None that I know will be, much that I fear
may chance.

Good morrow to you. Here the street is
narrow;

The throng that follows Caesar at the heels,
Of senators, of praetors, common suitors,

Will crowd a feeble man almost to death.
 I'll get me to a place more void, and there
 Speak to great Caesar as he comes along.
 (II, iv, 27-38)

When the assassination scene opens, we are on the edge of our chairs, wondering whether or not Caesar will be warned in time. The Soothsayer has little chance to say anything, and Artemidorus is angrily dismissed by Caesar:

Caes. The ides of March are come.
 Sooth. Ay, Caesar; but not gone.
 Art. Hail, Caesar! read this schedule.
 Dec. Trebonius doth desire you to o'er-read,
 At your best leisure, this his humble suit.
 Art. O Caesar, read mine first; for mine's a suit
 That touches Caesar nearer. Read it, great
 Caesar.
 Caes. What touches us ourself shall be last serv'd.
 Art. Delay not, Caesar; read it instantly.
 Caes. What, is the fellow mad?
 Pub. Sirrah, give place.
 Cas. What, urge you your petitions in the street?
 Come to the Capitol.
 (1-12)

But Popilius then comes forward, and the suspense is further drawn out:

Pop. I wish your enterprise to-day may thrive.
 Cas. What enterprise, Popilius?
 Pop. Fare you well.
 Bru. What said Popilius Lena?
 Cas. He wish'd to-day our enterprise might thrive.
 I fear our purpose is discovered.
 Bru. Look, how he makes to Caesar; mark him.
 Cas. Casca, be sudden, for we fear prevention.
 Brutus, what shall be done? If this be known,
 Cassius or Caesar never shall turn back,
 For I will slay myself.
 (13-22)

It is, however, only a false alarm:

Bru. Cassius, be constant!
Popilius Lena speaks not of our purpose,
For, look, he smiles, and Caesar doth
not change.
(22-24)

In this brief space of action, no less than four minor characters are introduced, all concerned with establishing suspense — a use of the minor character that Shakespeare nowhere else repeats. We wonder why. These four are found in North's Plutarch, of course; but Shakespeare did not usually follow his source word for word unless he had good reason. Perhaps Shakespeare never again had cause to deal with a parallel situation; or perhaps — and more probably — he discovered that he could create suspense without the uneconomical introduction of minor characters. Othello, for instance, is very finely drawn out: but the suspense is inherent in the action. Shakespeare, we must remember, was forever developing and improving his dramatic art — and Julius Caesar precedes the great tragedies in time.

(3) Foreshadowing

The minor character intimates to us what will happen later on in the play — he foreshadows future events. Consequently, of course, there can be no suspense. In Troilus and Cressida, for instance, Andromache foreshadows Hector's defeat by Achilles :

Unarm, unarm, and do not fight to-day.

Pursue we him on knees; for I have dream'd
Of bloody turbulence, and this whole night
Hath nothing been but shapes and forms of slaughter.
(V, iii, 3, 10-12)

We are pretty sure that Hector is going to fare rather badly:
and any remaining doubts that we might have are dispelled by
Cassandra's,

O, farewell, dear Hector!
Look, how thou diest! look, how thy eye turns pale!
Look, how thy wounds doth bleed at many vents!
Hark, how Troy roars! how Hecuba cries out!
How poor Andromache shrills her dolour forth!
Behold, distraction, frenzy, and amazement,
Like witless antics, one another meet,
And all cry, Hector! Hector's dead! O, Hector!
(80-87)

We might argue that there is still a measure of suspense
involved, since, although we rationally know that Hector will
be slain, we nevertheless continue to hope that he will not be.
This argument is quite true as far as it goes: but it ignores the
fact that if Shakespeare were striving only for suspense, he
would have left the outcome of the battle entirely in doubt. What
Shakespeare wishes to centre our attention upon is the manner
of Hector's death — or, more precisely, the manner in which
Achilles gains his victory. He does so by foregoing suspense:
and, no longer distracted by speculations as to what will happen,
we can concentrate upon how it happens.

Similarly, Hastings' death in Richard the Third is fore-
shadowed — by a Messenger:

Therefore he sends to know your lordship's pleasure,
 If you will presently take horse with him,
 And with all speed post with him toward the north
 To shun the danger that his soul divines.

(III, ii, 15-18)

Here, though, the suspense is abandoned to make more effective the ironic interchanges (already discussed) between Hastings and the Pursuivant, and Hastings and the Priest. (We should notice that foreshadowing almost always gives rise to irony, since, while we know the eventual outcome, the characters do not. Witness the appalling irony in Sophocles' Oedipus the King.)

A third example of this use of the minor character — and a rather odd one at that — is found in Antony and Cleopatra. In IV, iii, the Soldiers hear the music from beneath the stage. The music signifies that

the god Hercules, whom Antony lov'd,
 Now leaves him.

(16-17)

However, that such is the correct interpretation is not at all certain when we see the scene acted: and Antony immediately goes out and wins a victory, quite upsetting our expectations. Shakespeare, I think, wrote his first act and his last act, and then filled in the middle as quickly as possible, doing little more than dramatizing North's Plutarch. Since North's Plutarch contains the incident, so too does Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra. Whatever we may think of the dramatic worth of this scene, it is rather superfluous. Shakespeare has already

foreshadowed Antony's defeat through the Soothsayer in II, iii:

Thy demon, that thy spirit which keeps thee, is
Noble, courageous, high, unmatchable,
Where Caesar's is not; but, near him, thy angel
Becomes a fear, as being o'erpower'd: therefore
Make space between you.
(19-23)

Again, he does so in order that we may concentrate our attention upon Antony and Cleopatra, upon their love affair. Caesar's defeat of Antony is rather incidental to the main interest of the play. We should notice, too, that this Soothsayer is quite a grim fellow. In I, ii, he tells the fortunes of Charmian and Iras. To Charmian, he says, "You shall outlive the lady whom you serve" (31); and to Iras, "Your fortunes are alike" (56). It is true that Charmian outlives her mistress — by about half a minute; and the fortunes of Charmian and Iras certainly — and tragically — do turn out to be alike.

The minor characters so far discussed in this category have foreshadowed events which eventually do come to pass. They tell us that a thing is to happen, and it does happen. Sometimes, though, they mislead us. In King John, for instance, the Bastard enters with Peter of Pomfret, and informs John:

And here's a prophet that I brought with me
From forth the streets of Pomfret, whom I found
With many hundreds treading on his heels;
To whom he sung, in rude harsh-sounding rhymes,
That, ere the next Ascension-day at noon,
Your Highness should deliver up your crown.
(IV, ii, 147-152)

The King angrily asks, "Thou idle dreamer, wherefore didst

thou so?" (153); and Peter replies, "Foreknowing that the truth
sill fall out so" (154). Through this episode, we are led to
believe that the English forces will be defeated by the French,
since the whole scene deals with the French invasion. But as
things turn out, John yields up his crown, not to King Philip of
France, but to Cardinal Pandulph — in token of his submission
to the authority of the Pope:

Thus have I yielded up into your hand
The circle of my glory.
(V, i, 1-2)

And Pandulph immediately returns it:

Take again
From this my hand, as holding of the Pope,
Your sovereign greatness and authority.
(2-4)

Peter of Pomfret has spoken the truth; but he has framed his
prediction in such a way as to lead us to an incorrect conclusion.
I do not think, therefore, that we can really call this incident
dramatic foreshadowing; and I do not think that it has any place
in a tragedy. (King John, of course, is not — technically —
a tragedy: but it aims at being one.) Foreshadowing tells us
what is to happen so that we may concentrate upon how it happens;
Peter of Pomfret misleads us, and we feel surprised and some-
what cheated. Interestingly, Shakespeare never again intention-
ally sends us off on a false scent in a tragedy.

Although surprise is not suited to tragedy, it is suited
to romance, and especially to tragi-comedy. The Soothsayer

in Cymbeline, therefore, can quite appropriately intimate that the Romans will be victorious:

Last night the very gods show'd me a vision —
 I fast and pray'd for their intelligence — thus:
 I saw Jove's bird, the Roman eagle, wing'd
 From the spongy south to this part of the west,
 There vanish'd in the sunbeams; which portends —
 Unless my sins abuse my divination —
 Success to the Roman host.

(IV, ii, 346-352)

We know — really — that there is to be a happy ending: the Soothsayer is introduced to provide a measure of suspense. We should notice that his prophecy is equivocal, and that he qualifies it: "Unless my sins abuse my divination" As things turn out, he has, indeed, misinterpreted his dream. He explains:

The fingers of the powers above do tune
 The harmony of this peace. The vision
 Which I made known to Lucius, ere the stroke
 Of this yet scarce-cold battle, at this instant
 Is full accomplish'd; for the Roman eagle,
 From south to west on wing soaring aloft,
 Lessen'd herself, and in the beams o' th' sun
 So vanish'd; which foreshow'd our princely eagle,
 Th' imperial Caesar, should again unite
 His favour with the radiant Cymbeline,
 Which shines here in the west.

(V, v, 466-476)

There is one last example of this minor character: Curan in II, i of King Lear. He has this conversation with Edmund:

Cur. You have heard of the
 news abroad; I mean the whisper'd ones,
 for they are yet but ear-kissing arguments?
 Edm. Not I. Pray you, what are they?
 Cur. Have you heard of no likely wars toward,
 'twixt the Dukes of Cornwall and Albany?
 Edm. Not a word.
 Cur. You may do, then, in time. Fare you well,
 sir. (7-15)

Consequently, we are led to believe that there is enmity between Albany and Cornwall, and that they will eventually clash. But there is, apparently, no enmity at all between them. Albany does not even find out what is going on until IV, ii: and then Cornwall is dead. Shakespeare seems to be a bit ahead of himself here. Curan must be introduced at this point, though, to occasion Edmund's remarks to Edgar:

My father watches; O sir, fly this place;
Intelligence is given where you are hid;
You have now the good advantage of the night.
Have you not spoken 'gainst the Duke of Cornwall?
He's coming hither, now, i' th' night, i' th' haste,
And Regan with him. Have you nothing said
Upon his party 'gainst the Duke of Albany?
Advise yourself.

(22-29)

(4) Contrast

Montjoy appears three times in Henry the Fifth. In III, vi, he enters to Henry "and his poor Soldiers," and says:

Thus says my King: Say thou to Harry of
England: Though we seem'd dead, we did but sleep;
advantage is a better soldier than rashness. Tell
him we could have rebuk'd him at Harfleur, but
that we thought not good to bruise an injury till it
were full ripe. Now we speak upon our cue, and
our voice is imperial. England shall repent his
folly, see his weakness, and admire our suffer-
ance. Bid him therefore consider of his ransom

(125-133)

He speaks in the same tenor in IV, iii:

Once more I come to know of thee, King Harry,
If for thy ransom thou wilt now compound,

Before thy most assured overthrow;
 For certainly thou art so near the gulf,
 Thou needs must be englutted.
 (79-83)

In IV, vii, though, he has this to say:

I come to thee for charitable license,
 That we may wander o'er this bloody field
 To book our dead, and then to bury them;
 To sort our nobles from our common men.
 For many of our princes — woe the while! —
 Lie drown'd and soak'd in mercenary blood;
 So do our vulgar drench their peasant limbs
 In blood of princes; and their wounded steeds
 Fret fetlock deep in gore, and with wild rage
 Yerk out their armed heels at their dead masters,
 Killing them twice. O, give us leave, great King,
 To view the field in safety, and dispose
 Of their dead bodies!
 (74-86)

The contrast between this last appearance and the first two is obvious: and, through stressing the extent of the French defeat, magnifies Henry's victory. It is a quite simple use of the minor character to provide contrast. In Coriolanus, V, iv, two Messengers are used in much the same way — the purpose here being to emphasize the rapid changing in mood of the populace. The first Messenger reports:

Sir, if you'd save your life, fly to your house.
 The plebeians have got your fellow-tribune
 And hale him up and down, all swearing, if
 The Roman ladies bring not comfort home,
 They'll give him death by inches.
 (38-42)

A second Messenger immediately enters and says:

Good news, good news! The ladies have prevail'd,
 The Volscians are dislodg'd, and Marcius gone.
 A merrier day did never yet greet Rome,
 No, not th' expulsion of the Tarquins.

The trumpets, sackbuts, psalteries, and fifes,
 Tabors and cymbals and the shouting Romans,
 Make the sun dance. Hark you!
 (43-46, 52-54)

The contrast emphasizes the violent, quick-changing, dangerous mood of the mob — virtually a character in itself.

This minor character does not always have so obvious an employment. In the scene of Gloucester's blinding in King Lear, for instance, a Servant confronts Cornwall with:

Hold your hand, my lord!
 I have serv'd you ever since I was a child;
 But better service have I never done you
 Than now to bid you hold.
 (III, vii, 72-75)

Cornwall draws upon him, and they fight. Regan, however, takes up a sword and runs at him from behind — but not before he has mortally wounded Cornwall:

Oh, I am slain! My lord, you have one eye left
 To see some mischief on him. Oh!
 (81-82)

After speaking these lines, he dies; and Cornwall puts out Gloucester's other eye. What is this Servant's purpose in the play? Without him, the scene would be entirely too dark: his selfless action contrasts with the malevolence of Cornwall and Regan. We might say that he represents the powers of good. So too does the Old Man in the next scene, who enters leading Gloucester:

O, my good lord, I have been your
 tenant, and your father's tenant, these fourscore
 years.
 (IV, i, 13-15)

His final words:

I'll bring him the best 'parel that I have,
Come on't what will.

(51-52)

Similarly, a Messenger in IV, ii of Macbeth attempts to prevent the murder of Lady Macduff and her son, even though he may lose his life for doing so:

Bless you, fair dame! I am not to you known,
Thou in your state of honour I am perfect.
I doubt some danger does approach you nearly.
If you will take a homely man's advice,
Be not found here; hence, with your little ones.
To fright you thus, methinks, I am too savage;
To do worse to you were fell cruelty,
Which is too nigh your person. Heaven preserve you!
I dare abide no longer.

(65-73)

Again, he represents good, and contrasts with Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. (Kenneth Muir, editor of the New Arden Macbeth, says much the same thing about this Messenger. Concerning the English Doctor and the Scottish one, he remarks upon "the obvious contrast between the holy King of England and the unholy King of Scotland." See p. li and p. 134, n..)

We come now to the Clown in Othello, the Clown in Antony and Cleopatra, and the Porter in Macbeth. All three of them are most certainly concerned with dramatic contrast: but it is difficult to say precisely how. The Clown in Othello first appears in III, i, immediately following the scene of Cassio's disgrace and Iago's dark soliloquy:

Divinity of hell!

When devils will the blackest sins put on,
 They do suggest at first with heavenly shows,
 As I do now; for whiles this honest fool
 Plies Desdemona to repair his fortune
 And she for him pleads strongly to the Moor,
 I'll pour this pestilence into his ear,
 That she repeals him for her body's lust;
 And by how much she strives to do him good,
 She shall undo her credit with the Moor.
 So will I turn her virtue into pitch,
 And out of her own goodness make the net
 That shall enmesh them all.

(356-368)

The Clown comes in, exchanges a few jibes with the Musicians, and is then sent off on an errand by Cassio. This bit of humor is usually called "comic relief." There follows the very brief III, ii (six lines) and the rather long III, iii — a most appalling scene, as Iago twists Othello's love for Desdemona into hatred:

O, that the slave had forty thousand lives!
 One is too poor, too weak for my revenge.
 Now do I see 'tis true. Look here, Iago;
 All my fond love thus do I blow to heaven.
 'Tis gone.
 Arise, black vengeance, from the hollow hell!
 Yield up, O love, thy crown and hearted throne
 To tyrannous hate! Swell, bosom, with thy fraught,
 For 'tis of aspics' tongues!

(442-450)

III, iv then begins with a re-appearance of the Clown. Desdemona sends him off to find Cassio:

Des.	Do you know, sirrah, where Lieutenant Cassio lies?
Clo.	I dare not say he lies anywhere.
Des.	Why, man?
Clo.	He's a soldier, and for me to say a soldier lies, 'tis stabbing.
Des.	Go to! Where lodges he?
Clo.	To tell you where he lodges, is to tell you where I lie.

- Des. Can anything be made of this?
 Clo. I know not where he lodges, and for me to devise a lodging and say he lies here or he lies there, were to lie in mine own throat.
 Des. Can you inquire him out, and be edified by report?
 Clo. I will catechize the world for him; that is, make questions, and by them answer.
 Des. Seek him, bid him come hither. Tell him I have mov'd my lord on his behalf, and hope all will be well.
 Clo. To do this is within the compass of man's wit; and therefore I will attempt the doing it.

(1-22)

Othello immediately enters, and we have the brutal handkerchief episode. Now I do not think that we can call this second appearance of the Clown — and perhaps not the first either — comic relief. The humor contrasts, yes: but the contrast is a part of the terrible progression of the play toward its tragic conclusion: it is not a disparate interval of laughter, "comic relief." Under ordinary circumstances, the Clown's humor might be amusing: here, it is not. We can scarcely forget Othello's "Arise, black vengeance, from the hollow hell!" so soon. We have here an example of the strange re-inforcement of the tragic by the comic that is peculiar to English drama. We are not given a respite from the tragic: we are somehow made to feel it more deeply. These same remarks apply also to the Clown in the final act of Antony and Cleopatra. He brings "the pretty worm of Nilus": and almost exits a half-dozen times before he finally does go (I think that Shakespeare meant that he

should, three or four times, start for the door, and, as

Cleopatra is turning away, come back for another comment):

Cleo. Get thee hence; farewell.

Clown. I wish you all joy of the worm.

Cleo. Farewell.

Clown. You must think this, look you, that the worm will do his kind.

Cleo. Ay, ay; farewell.

Clown. Look you, the worm is not to be trusted but in the keeping of wise people; for, indeed, there is no goodness in the worm.

Cleo. Take thou no care; it shall be heeded.

Clown. Very good. Give it nothing, I pray you, for it is not worth the feeding.

Cleo. Will it eat me?

Clown. You must not think I am so simple but I know the devil himself will not eat a woman. I know that a woman is a dish for the gods, if the devil dress her not. But, truly, these same whoreson devils do the gods great harm in their women; for in every ten that they make, the devils mar five.

Cleo. Well, get thee gone; farewell.

Clown. Yes, forsooth; I wish you joy o' th' worm.
(V, ii, 260-281)

There is nothing funny about this interchange: indeed, it is very sad, very quietly tragic. More, it confers the stamp of truth upon the scene — for life continues to flood in on us despite our own personal griefs. Through the Clown episode, then, Cleopatra's great love is related to the world around: which is quite unaffected by it. Life will go on.

And so with the Porter in II, iii of Macbeth. If the Porter could be divorced from the play, he would be funny: in the context of Duncan's murder, he is not. Indeed, the horror already set forth by the preceding scene is heightened (as Kenneth

Muir says in the Introduction to the New Arden edition — see p. xxviii). Again, the Porter serves to make things terrifyingly real: the murder of Duncan is not taking place in a far-off castle in Scotland: it is taking place here and now, in this life of ours. That such is the effect Shakespeare meant to achieve is made quite obvious by the tremendous pounding going on throughout the Porter's soliloquy. We can hardly laugh at the Porter's remarks when we have just been startled half out of our wits. (Shakespeare learned very early the effectiveness of this knocking — see Romeo and Juliet, III, iii. The technique is repeated in Othello, V, ii.) In any event, it should be quite apparent that the term "comic relief" is scarcely applicable.

(5) Realism

There are a few minor characters who are used to create realism. Probably the best example occurs in I, v of Coriolanus, where the three looting Soldiers occupy the stage for a moment:

1. Rom. This will I carry to Rome.
 2. Rom. And I this.
 3. Rom. A murrain on't. I took this for silver.
- (1-3)

We might also mention — if it can be considered a minor character — the bear that pursues Antigonus in III, iii of The Winter's Tale. A good many other examples could no doubt be found: Bates, Court, and Williams in Henry the Fifth, for

instance, and the Gravediggers in Hamlet: but these characters all have more important functions and are discussed elsewhere.

(6) Amplification

In Hamlet, IV, v, a Messenger bursts in upon Claudius, and cries:

Save yourself, my lord!
The ocean, overpeering of his list,
Eats not the flats with more impetuous haste
Than young Laertes, in a riotous head,
O'erbears your officers. The rabble call him lord;
And, as the world were now but to begin,
Antiquity forgot, custom not known,
(The ratifiers and props of every word,)
They cry, "Choose we! Laertes shall be king!"
Caps, hands, and tongues applaud it to the clouds,
"Laertes shall be king, Laertes king!"
(98-108)

Laertes and his "rabble" then force their way in, Laertes demanding, "Where is this King?" (112), and, "O thou vile king, / Give me my father!" (115-116). The Messenger serves to broaden, to amplify, the danger facing Claudius: it is not just Laertes and a few Danes who are "in a riotous head," but the entire populace. It is this minor character — the Messenger, and others like him — who is dealt with in this category.

A second, rather similar, example is found in Julius Caesar, III, iii, where Cinna the poet is confronted by the Plebeians:

3. Pleb. Your name, sir, truly.
Cin. Truly, my name is Cinna.

1. Pleb. Tear him to pieces; he's a conspirator.
 Cin. I am Cinna the poet, I am Cinna the poet.
 4. Pleb. Tear him for his bad verses, tear him
 for his bad verses.
 Cin. I am not Cinna the conspirator.
 4. Pleb. It is no matter, his name's Cinna. Pluck
 but his name out of his heart, and turn
 him going.
 3. Pleb. Tear him, tear him!
 (28-40)

He is introduced into the play to amplify the violent spirit of the mob, which, in the preceding scene, we have only glimpsed.

This minor character is also used to amplify horizontally as well as vertically: that is, to demonstrate the effect of an incident elsewhere as well as to magnify the incident itself. In Macbeth, for instance, following the discovery of the murder of Duncan, an Old Man is brought on, who tells us:

Threescore and ten I can remember well;
 Within the volume of which time I have seen
 Hours dreadful and things strange; but this
 sore night
 Hath trifled former knowings.
 (II, iv, 1-4)

" 'Tis unnatural," he goes on,

Even like the deed that's done. On Tuesday last,
 A falcon, tow'ring in her pride of place,
 Was by a mousing owl hawk'd at and kill'd.
 (10-13)

And Ross adds:

And Duncan's horses — a thing most strange and
 certain —
 Beauteous and swift, the minions of their race,
 Turn'd wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,
 Contending 'gainst obedience, as they would make
 War with mankind.
 (14-18)

The purpose of this scene is to set forth the general disorder throughout the natural world resulting from Macbeth's unnatural deed. In Richard the Second, we find an almost identical use of this minor character: a Welsh Captain speaks:

'Tis thought the King is dead; we will not stay.
 The bay-trees in our country are all wither'd
 And meteors fright the fixed stars of heaven;
 The pale-fac'd moon looks bloody on the earth
 And lean-look'd prophets whisper fearful change;
 Rich men look sad and ruffians dance and leap,
 The one in fear to lose what they enjoy,
 The other to enjoy by rage and war.
 These signs forerun the death or fall of kings.
 Farewell! Our countrymen are gone and fled,
 As well assur'd Richard their king is dead.
 (II, iv, 7-17)

And in Richard the Third, III, vi, a Scrivener represents the populace and its view of Richard's tyranny:

Here is the indictment of the good Lord Hastings,
 Which in a set hand fairly is engross'd
 That it may be to-day read o'er in Paul's.
 And mark how well the sequel hangs together:
 Eleven hours I've spent to write it over,
 For yesternight by Catesby was it sent me;
 The precedent was full as long a-doing;
 And yet within these five hours Hastings liv'd,
 Untainted, unexamin'd, free, at liberty.
 Here's a good world the while! Who is so gross
 That cannot see this palpable device?
 Yet who so bold but says he sees it not?
 Bad is the world; and all will come to nought
 When such ill dealing must be seen in thought.
 (1-14)

Also in Richard the Third is the most extensive, and the most interesting, use of this minor character. In II, iii, three Citizens discuss the death of King Edward:

3. Cit. Doth the news hold of good King Edward's death?

2. Cit. Ay, sir, it is too true; God help the while!
3. Cit. Then, masters, look to see a troublous world.
1. Cit. No, no; by God's good grace his son shall
reign.
3. Cit. Woe to that land that's govern'd by a child!
2. Cit. In him there is a hope of government,
That in his nonage, council under him,
And in his full and ripened years himself,
No doubt, shall then and till then govern well.
1. Cit. So stood the state when Henry the Sixth
Was crown'd in Paris but at nine months old.
3. Cit. Stood the state so? No, no, good friends,
God wot;
For then this land was famously enrich'd
With politic grave counsel; then the King
Had virtuous uncles to protect his Grace.
1. Cit. Why, so hath this, both by his father and
mother.
2. Cit. Better it were they all came by his father,
Or by his father there were none at all;
For emulation who shall now be nearest
Will touch us all too near, if God prevent not.
O, full of danger is the Duke of Gloucester,
And the Queen's sons and brothers haught and
proud!
And were they to be rul'd, and not to rule,
This sickly land might solace as before.
(7-30)

It is as if "a window were opened on to the outside world."

Somewhat similar is the discussion of the two Officers in II, ii
of Coriolanus. They are speaking of Coriolanus.

1. Off. If he did not care whether he had their love
or no, he waved indifferently 'twixt doing
them neither good nor harm; but he seeks
their hate with greater devotion than they
can render it him, and leaves nothing undone
that may fully discover him their opposite.
Now, to seem to affect the malice and dis-
pleasure of the people is as bad as that
which he dislikes, to flatter them for their
love.
2. Off. He hath deserved worthily of his country;
and his ascent is not by such easy degrees
as those who, having been supple and

...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...

...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...

...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...

...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...

...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...

...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...

...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...

...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...

...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...

...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...

...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...

...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...

...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...

...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...
...the ... of ...

courteous to the people, bonneted, without any further deed to have them at all into their estimation and report. But he hath so planted his honours in their eyes and his actions in their hearts that for their tongues to be silent and not confess so much were a kind of ingrateful injury; to report otherwise were a malice that, giving itself the lie, would pluck reproof and rebuke from every ear that heard it.

1. Off. No more of him; he's a worthy man.
Make way, they are coming.
(18-40)

Their conversation widens, or amplifies, the range of the play, as well as telling us a good deal about Coriolanus.

And, as a final example, there is the Porter in II, iii of Macbeth:

Here's a knocking indeed! If a man were porter of hell-gate, he should have old turning the key. (Knocking) Knock, knock, knock! Who's there, i' th' name of Beelzebub? Here's a farmer, that hang'd himself on th' expectation of plenty. Come in time; have napkins enow about you; here you'll sweat for't. (Knocking) Knock, knock! Who's there, in th' other devil's name? Faith, here's an equivocator, that could swear in both the scales against either scale
(1-10)

His identification of himself with the "porter of hell-gate" has the effect of freeing the play from the restrictions of a particular time and place: the action is universalized. (For a fuller discussion, see the Introduction to the New Arden Macbeth, pp. xxvii ff.)

(7) Emphasis

In IV, iii of Henry the Fifth, the French Lords are

preparing for battle. Grandpré — a character we have never seen before, and will not see again — enters to them and says:

Why do you stay so long, my lords of France?
Yond island carrions, desperate of their bones,
Ill-favouredly become the morning field.
Their ragged curtains poorly are let loose,
And our air shakes them passing scornfully.
Big Mars seems bankrupt in their beggar'd host
And faintly through a rusty beaver peeps;
The horsemen sit like fixed candlesticks
With torch-staves in their hand; and their poor jades
Lob down their heads, dropping the hides and hips,
The gum down-roping from their pale-dead eyes,
And in their pale dull mouths the gimmal'd bit
Lies foul with chew'd grass, still and motionless;
And their executors, the knavish crows,
Fly o'er them, all impatient for their hour.
Description cannot suit itself in words
To demonstrate the life of such a battle,
In life so lifeless as it shows itself.

(38-55)

This description is not, on the surface, very flattering to the English: but subsequent developments make it so. The English win the battle. Shakespeare is glorifying Henry the Fifth: and the more he emphasizes the splendor of the French and the shabbiness of the English, the more wonderful becomes Henry's victory. Hence, the introduction of Grandpré.

We find a second example of this minor character in Antony and Cleopatra, III, vii. Antony has declared his intention to fight Caesar at sea. Canidius and Enobarbus both attempt to dissuade him, but Antony refuses to heed them. A Soldier then enters and implores:

O noble emperor, do not fight by sea;
Trust not to rotten planks! Do you misdoubt

This sword and these my wounds? Let the Egyptians
And the Phoenicians go a-ducking; we
Have us'd to conquer, standing on the earth,
And fighting foot to foot.

(62-67)

The Soldier, of course, serves to emphasize that Antony
has, indeed, been transformed "into a strumpet's fool."

Similarly, when Aumerle is being accused of treason in

Richard the Second, "Another Lord" is introduced to add his
denunciation to those of Bagot, Fitzwater, and Percy:

I task the earth to the like, forsworn Aumerle;
And spur thee on with full as many lies
As may be holloa'd in thy treacherous ear
From sun to sun. There is my honour's pawn;
Engage it to the trial, if thou dar'st.

(IV, i, 52-56)

This "piling-up" process is probably Shakespeare's
favorite technique for obtaining emphasis. We see it used
again and again. In I, ii of Timon of Athens, a Servant
announces to Timon:

My lord, there are certain nobles of the Senate
Newly alighted, and come to visit you.

(180-181)

Shakespeare, through this Servant, is telling us of Timon's
widespread popularity — the nobles never do make an appear-
ance. But more: Shakespeare wishes to emphasize this popu-
larity. A second Servant therefore announces:

May it please your honour, Lord Lucius,
Out of his free love, hath presented to you
Four milk-white horses, trapp'd in silver.

(187-189)

and a third:

Please you, my lord, that honourable
gentleman, Lord Lucullus, entreats your company
to-morrow to hunt with him, and has sent your
honour two brace of greyhounds.
(192-195)

And so in Richard the Third, IV, iv, where a first Messenger
reports:

My gracious sovereign, now in Devonshire,
As I by friends am well advertised,
Sir Edward Courtney, and the haughty prelate,
Bishop of Exeter, his elder brother,
With many moe confederates, are in arms.
(500-504)

a second:

In Kent, my liege, the Guildfords are in arms;
And every hour more competitors
Flock to the rebels, and their power grows strong.
(505-507)

and a fourth:

Sir Thomas Lovel and Lord Marquis Dorset,
'Tis said, my liege, in Yorkshire are in arms.
(520-521)

(The third Messenger brings good news, and has already been
discussed under "Characterization.") The overwhelming effect
of this series of Messengers is one of impending disaster.

Also in Richard the Third, we find a rather amusing
example of this technique. I refer to II, ii, where the Son
and Daughter of Clarence are introduced to contribute to the
general woe:

Q. Eliz. Ah for my husband, for my dear lord Edward!
Chil. Ah for our father, for our dear lord Clarence!

Duch. Alas for both, both mine, Edward and
Clarence!
Q. Eliz. What stay had I but Edward? and he's gone.
Chil. What stay had we but Clarence? and he's
gone.
Duch. What stays had I but they? and they are gone.
Q. Eliz. Was never widow had so dear a loss!
Chil. Were never orphans had so dear a loss!
Duch. Was never mother had so dear a loss!
(71-79)

Richard the Third is an early play, and Shakespeare has not yet learned how to handle grief in any but a stylized manner.

This minor character can also be used to emphasize the moral of a play — as the Gardener does in III, iv of Richard the Second (he is speaking of Richard):

O, what pity is it
That he had not so trimm'd and dress'd his land
As we this garden! We at time of year
Do wound the bark, the skin of our fruit-trees,
Lest, being over-proud in sap and blood,
With too much riches it confound itself;
Had he done so to great and growing men,
They might have liv'd to bear and he to taste
Their fruits of duty. Superfluous branches
We lop away, that bearing boughs may live;
Had he done so, himself had borne the crown,
Which waste of idle hours hath quite thrown down.
(55-66)

Personally, I feel that such moralizing is intrusive: the meaning of the play should be implicit in the action of the play. The validity of this criticism becomes apparent when we examine the very bitter Timon of Athens. Not only are Timon and Apemantus made to moralize time and again about the selfishness of man, but several minor characters are written into the play to do the same thing. In III, ii, a Stranger says:

Why, this is the world's soul; and just of the
same piece
Is every flatterer's spirit. Who can call him
His friend that dips in the same dish? for, in
My knowing, Timon has been this lord's father,
And kept his credit with his purse,
Supported his estate; nay, Timon's money
Has paid his men their wages. He ne'er drinks
But Timon's silver treads upon his lip;
And yet — O, see the monstrousness of man
When he looks out in an ungrateful shape! —
He does deny him, in respect of his,
What charitable men afford to beggars.

(71-82)

and in IV, ii, a Servant:

As we do turn our backs
From our companion thrown into his grave,
So his familiars to his buried fortunes
Slink all away, leave their false vows with him,
Like empty purses pick'd; and his poor self,
A dedicated beggar to the air,
With his disease of all-shunn'd poverty,
Walks, like contempt, alone.

(8-15)

It is possible to have too much theme and too little play.²²

The minor characters discussed in this chapter have been concerned with the dramatic effect of the plays. There is little more to be said about them. They could easily be dispensed with, no doubt, and neither the course nor the outcome of the plays would be affected: but the plays would none the less suffer from the loss. Such things as irony, suspense, contrast, and emphasis flesh out the bare bones of the action — and these minor characters, by adding these dramatic values, vitalize the plays, broaden their scope.

Chapter IV

MINOR CHARACTERS CONCERNED WITH THE ACTION

A large number of minor characters find their way into the plays because of the requirements of the action. They serve to initiate the action, to forward it, and to conclude it.

(1) The Initiating of the Action

In the opening scene of King John, Chatillon, an ambassador from France, enters with John, Eleanor, the three English Earls, and others. John asks, "Now, say, Chatillon, what would France with us?" (1); and there follows,

- Chat. Thus, after greeting, speaks the King of France
In my behaviour to the majesty,
The borrowed majesty, of England here.
- El. A strange beginning: "borrowed majesty!"
- K.John. Silence, good mother; hear the embassy.
- Chat. Philip of France, in right and true behalf
Of thy deceased brother Geoffrey's son,
Arthur Plantagenet, lays most lawful claim
To this fair island and the territories,
To Ireland, Poitiers, Anjou, Touraine, Maine,
Desiring thee to lay aside the sword
Which sways usurpingly these several titles,
And put the same into young Arthur's hand,
Thy nephew and right royal sovereign.
- K.John. What follows if we disallow of this?
- Chat. The proud control of fierce and bloody war,
To enforce these rights so forcibly withheld.
- K.John. Here have we war for war and blood for blood,
Controlment for controlment: so answer France.
- Chat. Then take my king's defiance from my mouth,
The farthest limit of my embassy.
- K.John. Bear mine to him, and so depart in peace.
Be thou as lightning in the eyes of France;

For ere thou canst report I will be there,
The thunder of my cannon shall be heard.
(2-26)

The play has barely begun, and yet the main theme — the conflict between Philip and John — has been stated, and John is virtually on his way to France. The importance of Chatillon's role is obvious. Shakespeare must now, however, introduce Philip Faulconbridge into the plot. To facilitate this introduction, his half-brother Robert — another minor character — is brought on. (I have already discussed Robert's role as foil to Philip: see III, 5.) He claims that Philip is bastard son to the late Sir Robert, and therefore has no right to Sir Robert's estate:

My gracious liege, when that my father liv'd,
Your brother did employ my father much, —

And once dispatch'd him in an embassy
To Germany, there with the Emperor
To treat of high affairs touching that time.
Th' advantage of his absence took the King
And in the meantime sojourn'd at my father's,
Where how he did prevail I shame to speak.
But truth is truth. Large lengths of seas and shores
Between my father and my mother lay,
As I have heard my father speak himself,
When this same lusty gentleman was got.
(95-96, 99-108)

The dispute is finally settled by Queen Eleanor, speaking to the Bastard:

I like thee well. Wilt thou forsake thy fortune,
Bequeath thy land to him and follow me?
I am a soldier, and now bound to France.
(148-150)

Philip replies:

Brother, take you my land, I'll take my chance.
 Your face hath got five hundred pound a year,
 Yet sell your face for five pence and 'tis dear.
 Madam, I'll follow you unto the death.
 (151-154)

Now that Philip has been worked into the plot, there is no further need of Robert — and he disappears. It is interesting to note that Shakespeare is careful to remove any lingering doubts we might have as to Philip's true parentage: Lady Faulconbridge enters, and at length admits:

King Richard Coeur-de-lion was thy father.
 By long and vehement suit I was seduc'd
 To make room for him in my husband's bed.
 (253-255)

The first scene is, I think, a good beginning: and owes much of its admirable economy to the efforts of Chatillon and Robert Faulconbridge.

Just as Chatillon in King John gives us necessary background information, so too does the Captain in I, ii of Twelfth Night (I, i affords us a glimpse of Orsino). He tells us about the shipwreck:

...To comfort you with chance,
 Assure yourself, after our ship did split,
 When you and those poor number sav'd with you
 Hung on our driving boat, I saw your brother,
 Most provident in peril, bind himself,
 Courage and hope both teaching him the practice,
 To a strong mast that liv'd upon the sea;
 Where like Arion on the dolphin's back,
 I saw him hold acquaintance with the waves
 So long as I could see.
 (8-17)

about Orsino:

For but a month ago I went from hence,
 And then 'twas fresh in murmur — as, you know,
 What great ones do the less will prattle of —
 That he did seek the love of fair Olivia.
 (31-34)

and about Olivia:

A virtuous maid, the daughter of a count
 That died some twelvemonth since, then leaving her
 In the protection of his son, her brother,
 Who shortly also died; for whose dear love,
 They say, she hath abjur'd the company
 And sight of men.
 (36-41)

Furthermore, it is to the Captain that Viola reveals her plan to disguise herself as a man:

I'll serve this duke.
 Thou shalt present me as an eunuch to him.
 It may be worth thy pains, for I can sing
 And speak to him in many sorts of music
 That will allow me very worth his service.
 What else may hap, to time I will commit,
 Only shape thou thy silence to my wit.
 (55-61)

Very much akin to this Captain is the Messenger in I, i of Much Ado About Nothing. Through him, we learn that "Don Pedro of Arragon comes this night to Messina" (1-2); that Claudio "hath borne himself beyond the promise of his age, doing, in the figure of a lamb, the feats of a lion" (13-15); and that Benedick "hath done good service...in these wars" (48-49). We also learn that Beatrice is more than casually interested in Benedick — an interest that she does her best to disguise:

I pray you, is Signior Mountanto return'd
 from the wars or no?
 (30-31)

We come now to the bleeding Captain in Macbeth. He tells Duncan what he knows of the battle he has just left:

Doubtful it stood,
As two spent swimmers that do cling together
And choke their art. The merciless Macdonwald —
Worthy to be a rebel, for to that
The multiplying villanies of nature
Do swarm upon him — from the Western Isles
Of kerns and gallowglasses is suppli'd;
And Fortune, on his damned quarrel smiling,
Show'd like a rebel's whore. But all's too weak;
For brave Macbeth — well he deserves that name —
Disdaining Fortune, with his brandish'd steel,
Which smok'd with bloody execution,
Like Valour's minion carv'd out his passage
Till he fac'd the slave;
Which ne'er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him,
Till he unseam'd him from the nave to th' chaps,
And fix'd his head upon our battlements.

(I, ii, 7-23)

As Nosworthy observed in 1946,

Most editors and commentators have rejected, in whole or part, the scene in Macbeth in which the bleeding captain and Ross tell of the fortunes of battle and the prowess of Macbeth.²³

Nosworthy goes on to defend the scene, saying,

Shakespeare, who built often enough on his past achievements, as the striking similarities between Macbeth and the earlier and uncompromisingly Senecan Richard III show, was quite capable, even in 1606, of introducing some "musty foppery of antiquity" in his own good way. The impact, conscious and unconscious, of earlier practice on a play like Macbeth, fundamentally a tragedy of blood with a considerable revenge theme, cannot be ignored, and the "bleeding captain" scene, though more mannered than the rest of the play, is no more derivative. Other writers, notably Marston, might have affected the style in 1606, but in view of Shakespeare's known use of it years earlier, there seems no reason for suspecting collaboration or interpolation, and the claims of

others, pending the discovery of new and decisive evidence, can be set aside.²⁴

In recent years, editorial opinion has tended to support Nosworthy and regard this scene as, in fact, Shakespearian: the New Cambridge commenting (on several scenes, including I, ii),

These passages cannot all be discussed, but the authenticity of most of them can be reasonably vindicated. For example, the second scene of the play, though perhaps not memorable, provides imperative exposition quite adequately.²⁵

We may add, as has been seen above, that this form of exposition is very much in keeping with Shakespeare's method in several other plays.

The minor characters in this category so far examined have all been, more or less, caught up in the action of the play, if only for a moment or two. Sometimes, though, they act almost as a prologue. The Winter's Tale, for instance, begins with a discussion between Camillo and Archidamus that has little to do with the main action of the play — but that does supply necessary information:

Cam. Sicilia cannot show himself over-kind to Bohemia. They were train'd together in their childhoods; and there rooted betwixt them then such an affection, which cannot choose but branch now. Since their more mature dignities and royal necessities made separation of their society, their encounters, though not personal, hath been royally attorneyed with interchange of gifts, letters, loving embassies; that they have seem'd to be together, though absent; shook hands, as over a vast; and embrac'd, as it were, from the ends of opposed winds. The heavens continue their loves!

Arch. I think there is not in the world either malice or matter to alter it. You have an unspeakable comfort of your young prince Mamillius. It is a gentleman of the greatest promise that ever came into my note.

Cam. I very well agree with you in the hopes of him. It is a gallant child....
(23-42)

Camillo, of course, is a major character — but we do not see Archidamus again. Similarly, Antony and Cleopatra opens with Philo telling Demetrius:

Nay, but this dotage of our general's
O'erflows the measure. Those his goodly eyes,
That o'er the files and musters of the war
Have glow'd like plated Mars, now bend, now turn
The office and devotion of their view
Upon a tawny front; his captain's heart,
Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst
The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper,
And is become the bellows and the fan
To cool a gipsy's lust.
(1-10)

Antony and Cleopatra then enter with their train, and Antony refuses to hear the messengers from Rome:

Now, for the love of Love and her soft hours,
Let's not confound the time with conference harsh.
There's not a minute of our lives should stretch
Without some pleasure now.
(44-47)

They exit: and Demetrius and Philo once more have the stage to themselves:

Dem. Is Caesar with Antonius priz'd so slight?
Phi. Sir, sometimes, when he is not Antony,
He comes too short of that great property
Which still should go with Antony.
Dem. I am full sorry
That he approves the common liar, who

Thus speaks of him at Rome; but I will hope
Of better deeds to-morrow. Rest you happy!
(56-62)

Their comments are no more than detached observations; they make them and then disappear. We find this same method of exposition in I, i of Cymbeline — where a Gentleman discourses at some length to a rather curious companion, telling him — among other things — of the marriage of Imogen to Posthumus, of the banishment of Posthumus, of Posthumus' lineage, and of the kidnapping of the King's two sons. Shakespeare is here concerned with sketching in background information as quickly as possible. And so with the various prologues. Rumour, for instance, prologue to the Second Part of Henry the Fourth, tells us of King Henry's victory at Shrewsbury, and then sets the scene of I, i:

I run before King Harry's victory,
Who in a bloody field by Shrewsbury
Hath beaten down young Hotspur and his troops,
Quenching the flame of bold rebellion
Even with the rebel's blood. But what mean I
To speak so true at first? My office is
To noise abroad that Harry Monmouth fell
Under the wrath of noble Hotspur's sword,
And that the King before the Douglas' rage
Stoop'd his anointed head as low as death.
This have I rumour'd through the peasant towns
Between that royal field of Shrewsbury
And this worm-eaten hold of ragged stone,
Where Hotspur's father, old Northumberland,
Lies crafty-sick.

(23-37)

He is necessary to recall for us what has happened in the First Part of Henry the Fourth.

We should notice, too, that the type of play has a good deal to do with Shakespeare's method of exposition. Cymbeline begins very undramatically because Shakespeare must get across to us a large amount of information — and he must do it with all possible dispatch. For the same reason, Gower is brought on as prologue to Pericles:

This king unto him took a fere,
 Who died and left a female heir,
 So buxom, blithe, and full of face
 As heaven had lent her all his grace;
 With whom the father liking took,
 And her to incest did provoke, —
 Bad child; worse father! to entice his own
 To evil should be done by none.
 By custom what they did begin
 Was with long use account'd no sin.
 The beauty of this sinful dame
 Made many princes thither frame
 To seek her as a bed-fellow,
 In marriage-pleasures play-fellow;
 Which to prevent he made a law
 To keep her still and men in awe,
 That whoso ask'd her for his wife,
 His riddle told not, lost his life.
 (21-38)

When we turn to the tragedies, though, we find something quite different. By and large, they begin with action. The first scene of Romeo and Juliet, for instance, is a brawl between the Capulets and the Montagues. (The prologue does not get the action underway, but gives a brief outline of the plot.) What we most need to know is that there is antipathy between the two families — and the opening scene certainly establishes as much. The minor characters who initiate the action are Sampson and Gregory on the one side, and Abraham and Balthasar on the other:

Gre. I will frown as I pass by, and let them take it as they list.
 Sam. Nay, as they dare. I will bite my thumb at them; which is disgrace to them, if they bear it.
 Abr. Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?
 Sam. I do bite my thumb, sir.
 Abr. Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?
 Sam. Is the law of our side, if I say ay?
 Gre. No.
 Sam. No, sir, I do not bite my thumb at you, sir; but I bite my thumb, sir.
 Gre. Do you quarrel, sir?
 Abr. Quarrel, sir? No, sir.
 Sam. But if you do, sir, I am for you. I serve as good a man as you.
 Abr. No better.
 Sam. Well, sir.

(46-64)

Julius Caesar, too, has quite a dramatic first scene. Flavius and Marullus enter with the revelling Commoners and berate them for rejoicing in Caesar's triumph:

Flav. But wherefore art not in thy shop to-day?
 Why dost thou lead these men about the streets?
 Cob. Truly, sir, to wear out their shoes, to get myself into more work. But, indeed, sir, we make holiday, to see Caesar and to rejoice in his triumph.
 Mar. Wherefore rejoice? What conquest brings he home?
 What tributaries follow him to Rome
 To grace in captive bonds his chariot-wheels?
 You blocks, you stones, you worse than
 senseless things!
 O you hard hearts, you cruel men of Rome,
 Knew you not Pompey?

(31-42)

Again, the scene sets forth the main theme of the play: Caesar's ambition, which would make him emperor and destroy the free republic. The rest of the play follows inevitably.²⁶

(2) The Forwarding of the Action: Directly

Some minor characters advance the action by taking part in it. There are quite a number of them, and they perform a number of tasks. Several announce something — as does the Herald in the last scene of King Lear:

"If any man of quality or degree
within the lists of the army will maintain upon
Edmund, supposed Earl of Gloucester, that he is a
manifold traitor, let him appear by the third sound
of the trumpet. He is bold in his defence."
(110-114)

Other examples are the two Heralds in II, i of King John, and the two Heralds in I, iii of Richard the Second.

These minor characters are also used to arrest someone. The Watch in Much Ado About Nothing, for instance — rather surprisingly — arrest Conrade and Borachio. Even more surprisingly, they remember why they have arrested them. Similarly, Fang and Snare are introduced to arrest Falstaff in the Second Part of Henry the Fourth, at Mistress Quickly's suit. Snare knows his man quite well:

It may chance cost some of us our lives,
for he will stab.
(II, i, 12-13)

And Mistress Quickly readily agrees:

He will foin like
any devil; he will spare neither man, woman, nor
child.
(17-19)

The upshot of the whole affair is that Falstaff, characteristic-

ally, does not pay Quickly what he owes her, but manages to talk her into pawning her plate and tapestries to provide him with ten pounds.

Again, these minor characters sometimes forward the action by delivering something — as does the Clown of Titus Andronicus. In IV, iii, Titus gives him a supplication to present to the Emperor:

Then here is a supplication for you. And when you come to him, at the first approach you must kneel, then kiss his foot, then deliver up your pigeons, and then look for your reward. I'll be at hand, sir; see you do it bravely.

(109-113)

In IV, iv, he cheerfully enters to Saturninus, presents the supplication, and is told, "Come, sirrah, you must be hang'd" (47). And, we must suppose, he is — since nothing further is heard of him. This incident, to my mind, violates dramatic propriety: there is no justification for the hanging of the Clown, and therefore it must seem to us a wanton cruelty. If Shakespeare is attempting to demonstrate Saturninus' cruelty, he has gone about it the wrong way. The Clown does Titus a favor, and he is hanged for it: and we tend to censure Titus for getting the poor man involved in his quarrel. (We might mention the rather grim sense of humour of this fellow: "Hang'd! by 'r lady, then I have brought up a neck to a fair end" (48-49).)

Another minor character who receives rather shoddy treatment is Eglamour in The Two Gentlemen of Verona. Silvia

asks him to accompany her to Mantua (where she mistakenly thinks Valentine is), and he gallantly replies:

Madam, I pity much your grievances;
Which since I know they virtuously are plac'd,
I give consent to go along with you,
Recking as little what betideth me
As much I wish all good befortune you.
(IV, iii, 37-41)

They set off and, in the forest, are encountered by the Outlaws. In V, iii, the Outlaws enter with Silvia; and, in reply to the question, "Where is the gentleman that was with her?" (6), one of them says:

Being nimble-footed, he hath outrun us,
But Moyses and Valerius follow him.
(7-8)

At play's end, he is presumably still galloping about through the forest. Again, we feel that he deserves a better fate. Similarly, Surrey, in IV, i of Richard the Second, comes also to an undisclosed end. He is introduced to second Aumerle (Aumerle, after all, has a further role: he can hardly be imprisoned at this point), and exchanges these words with Fitzwater:

Surrey. My Lord Fitzwater, I do remember well
The very time Aumerle and you did talk.
Fitz. 'Tis very true; you were in presence then,
And you can witness with me this is true.
Surrey. As false, by heaven, as heaven itself is
true.
(60-64)

Whether or not he is one of the traitors, we are not told; neither are we told what becomes of him. But Titus Andronicus, The Two Gentlemen, and Richard the Second are early plays; and

Shakespeare is a young dramatist. In his later work, Shakespeare is a good deal more careful to render justice to his minor as well as his major characters.

We come now to young Siward in Macbeth, Thaliard in Pericles, and a Knight in King Lear. They all forward the action by corroborating some aspect of it. In IV, i of Macbeth, Macbeth is told by an apparition:

Be bloody, bold, and resolute; laugh to scorn
The pow'r of man; for none of woman born
Shall harm Macbeth.

(79-81)

When, toward the end of the play, he leaves his castle to face his enemies on the battlefield, we must be shown that he is, indeed, invulnerable to any "of woman born." Young Siward is therefore introduced. Macbeth encounters him and slays him:

Thou wast born of woman.
But swords I smile at, weapons laugh to scorn,
Brandish'd by man that's of a woman born.

(V, vii, 11-13)

For a similar reason, Thaliard finds himself in I, i and iii of Pericles. Pericles, having discovered the "guilty secret" of Antiochus, reasons that he had best clear out:

Then, lest my life be cropp'd to keep you clear,
By flight I'll shun the danger which I fear.

(I, i, 141-142)

To prove that Pericles was right in his fears, Shakespeare brings on Thaliard — who is told by Antiochus:

Thaliard,
 You are of our chamber, and our mind partakes
 Her private actions to your secrecy;
 And for your faithfulness we will advance you.
 Thaliard, behold, here's poison, and here's gold;
 We hate the Prince of Tyre, and thou must kill him.
 (I, i, 151-156)

His role is a necessary one, since it would hardly do for Pericles to go sailing off to Tarsus if he were in no danger.

Turning to the Knight in I, iv of King Lear, we discover that he is much more important to the action than his mere fifteen lines would indicate. Lear and his train are staying with Goneril. Goneril has already asserted:

By day and night he wrongs me; every hour
 He flashes into one gross crime or other
 That sets us all at odds. I'll not endure it.
 His knights grow riotous, and himself upbraids us
 On every trifle.
 (I, iii, 3-7)

She therefore tells Oswald:

When he returns from hunting
 I will not speak with him; say I am sick.
 If you come slack of former services,
 You shall do well; the fault of it I'll answer.
 (I, iii, 7-10)

Lear, of course, sees things in a different light. Since both are prejudiced, what are we to think? Is Lear flashing "into one gross crime or other"? The Knight tells us the truth of the matter:

My lord, I know not what the matter is;
 but, to my judgement, your Highness is not entertain'd with that ceremonious affection as you were wont. There's a great abatement of kindness appears as well in the general dependants as in the

Duke himself also and your daughter.
(I, iv, 61-67)

And, further:

I beseech^r you, pardon me, my lord, if I
be mistaken; for my duty cannot be silent when I
think your Highness wrong'd.
(69-71)

The Knight is a minor character with no personality: and consequently has no reason to lie.

We might also mention, in this context, the Messenger in II, i of Titus Andronicus. He describes interscene action, but he is also involved directly in the action, since he brings proof of the death of Titus' two sons — that is, their heads.

Another group of these minor characters forwards the action by motivating it. In Titus Andronicus, Titus' sons ask for

the proudest prisoner of the Goths,
That we may hew his limbs and on a pile
Ad manes fratrum sacrifice his flesh
Before this earthy prison of their bones;
That so the shadows be not unappeas'd,
Nor we disturb'd with prodigies on earth.
(I, i, 96-101)

Titus gives them Alarbus, eldest son to Tamora — despite Tamora's pleas:

Stay, Roman brethren! Gracious conqueror,
Victorious Titus, rue the tears I shed,
A mother's tears in passion for her son;
And if thy sons were ever dear to thee,
O, think my son to be as dear to me!
(104-108)

Though Alarbus does not speak a single word, he — or rather,

his death — motivates Tamora's revenge against the Andronici.

In II, iii, she says to Lavinia:

Hadst thou in person ne'er offended me,
Even for his sake am I pitiless.
Remember, boys, I pour'd forth tears in vain
To save your brother from the sacrifice;
But fierce Andronicus would not relent.
Therefore, away with her, and use her as you will;
The worse to her, the better lov'd of me.
(161-167)

Similarly, the Second Merchant in IV, i of The Comedy of Errors is used to motivate Angelo's insistence that he receive, from Antipholus of Ephesus, the sum owing to him for the necklace. Angelo is indebted to this Second Merchant, and the Merchant threatens him with arrest if he does not immediately discharge the debt:

You know since Pentecost the sum is due,
And since I have not much importun'd you;
Nor now I had not, but that I am bound
To Persia and want guilders for my voyage.
Therefore make present satisfaction,
Or I'll attach you by this officer.
(1-6)

Angelo, therefore, demands payment from Antipholus of Ephesus (who, of course, has not received the chain):

Saving your merry humour, here's the note
How much your chain weighs to the utmost carat,
The fineness of the gold, and chargeful fashion,
Which doth amount to three odd ducats more
Than I stand debted to this gentleman.
I pray you, see him presently discharg'd,
For he is bound to sea and stays but for it.
(27-33)

And we are plunged into the business of Antipholus' arrest, the sending of Dromio of Syracuse for money, and so forth.

There is one more instance of this employment of this minor character: we find it in Pericles, III, i. The scene is a ship, and a storm is raging. Thaisa has just died (supposedly). A Sailor tells Pericles:

Sir, your queen must overboard. The
sea works high, the wind is loud, and will not lie
till the ship be clear'd of the dead.
(47-49)

Pericles replies, "That's just your superstition" (50); but another Sailor backs the first:

Pardon us, sir; with us at sea it hath
been still observed, and we are strong in custom.
Therefore briefly yield her; for she must overboard
straight.
(51-54)

Thaisa is therefore put into a chest and committed to the sea. It is necessary for the plot that she be so disposed of: and the Sailors provide the motivation.

While we are on the subject of Pericles, we should mention also the three Fishermen of II, i. They serve, primarily, to outfit Pericles for the jousts. But Shakespeare gives them a much larger role than is strictly necessary. He humanizes them. He makes them, though they are humble fishermen, quite admirable:

I can compare our rich
misers to nothing so fitly as to a whale; 'a plays
and tumbles, driving the poor fry before him, and
at last devour them all at a mouthful. Such whales
have I heard of o' th' land, who never leave gaping
till they swallow'd the whole parish, church,
steeple, bells, and all.
(32-38)

Pericles is moved to remark:

How from the finny subject of the sea
These fishers tell the infirmities of men;
And from their wat'ry empire recollect
All that may men approve or men detect!
(52-55)

And, a comment that is surely as much Shakespeare's as Pericles':

How well this honest mirth be-
comes their labour!
(98-99)

We should compare, with these Fishermen, the Gaoler in V, iv
of Cymbeline. He is made to say:

Unless a man would marry a gallows and
beget young gibbets, I never saw one so prone.
Yet, on my conscience, there are verier knaves
desire to live, for all he be a Roman; and there be
some of them too that die against their wills.
So should I, if I were one. I would we were all
of one mind, and one mind good. O, there were
desolation of gaolers and gallowses! I speak against
my present profit, but my wish hath a preferment
in't.
(206-215)

The last four or five lines of this speech are quite extraneous to
the play's action.

A very interesting use of this minor character is found
in Julius Caesar, IV, iii. Brutus, in his tent, says to Lucius:

What, thou speak'st drowsily?
Poor knave, I blame thee not; thou art o'erwatch'd.
Call Claudius and some other of my men;
I'll have them sleep on cushions in my tent.
(240-243)

Lucius calls Varro and Claudius: and Brutus requests of them:

I pray you, sirs, lie in my tent and sleep;
It may be I shall raise you by and by

On business to my brother Cassius.
(246-248)

They are apparently introduced only so that Brutus, after seeing the Ghost of Caesar, can ask them, "Saw you anything?" (305). They reply — as does Lucius — in the negative. Shakespeare is here following North's Plutarch rather closely (the words of the Ghost, for instance, are copied almost unchanged):

So, being ready to go into Europe, one night very late (when all the camp took quiet rest) as he was in his tent with a little light, thinking of weighty matters, he thought he heard one come in to him, and casting his eye towards the door of his tent, that he saw a wonderful strange and monstrous shape of a body coming towards him, and said never a word. So Brutus boldly asked what he was, a god or a man, and what cause brought him thither? The spirit answered him, "I am thy evil spirit, Brutus: and thou shalt see me by the city of Philippes." Brutus being no otherwise afraid, replied again unto it: "Well, then I shall see thee again." The spirit presently vanished away: and Brutus called his men unto him, who told him that they heard no noise, nor saw anything at all.²⁷

But Plutarch goes on:

Thereupon Brutus returned again to think on his matters as he did before: and when the day brake, he went unto Cassius, to tell him what vision had appeared unto him in the night. Cassius being in opinion an Epicurean, and reasoning thereon with Brutus, spake to him touching the vision thus. "In our sect, Brutus, we have an opinion, that we do not always feel or see that which we suppose we do both see and feel, but that our senses being credulous and therefore easily abused (when they are idle and unoccupied in their own objects) are induced to imagine they see and conjecture that which in truth they do not."²⁸

And so forth. One wonders whether or not Shakespeare accepted Plutarch's view of ghosts. The presence of Varro and Claudius

would lead us to believe that he did — I can see no other reason for his writing two more minor characters into the play. The theory (even if it is based upon any real evidence) that the Elizabethans considered a ghost capable of appearing to only one person if he (or it) so desired simply begs the question. The whole problem, however, is too involved to be gone into here.

Two more minor characters in this category remain to be considered: the Murderers in Macbeth and Mamillius in The Winter's Tale. The Murderers in Macbeth have a role the same as that of the Conspirators in V, vi of Coriolanus, or the Murderers in I, iv of Richard the Third — except that a third Murderer suddenly appears in III, iii and complicates matters. This third Murderer has been seen by some commentators as representative of the interposition of "the divine hand of providence." Such an interpretation is no doubt prompted by Holinshed's remark,

It chanced yet, by the benefit of the darke night,
that, though the father were slaine, the sonne yet,
by the helpe of almightie God reseruing him to better
fortune, escaped that danger²⁹

But such an interpretation must ignore the third Murderer's assertion that Macbeth ordered him to join the other two — and I have already pointed out that minor characters in Shakespeare never tell lies. I am therefore inclined to agree with Dover Wilson's suggestion that Macbeth, "tyrant-like, feels he must

spy even upon his own chosen instruments."³⁰ Too, we should notice that Shakespeare regularly varies the outcome from the plan: the Clowns in A Midsummer-Night's Dream present a play far different from the one they have been rehearsing, and Hamlet, instead of writing "a dozen or sixteen lines", writes probably some eighty lines.

And, finally, Mamillius in The Winter's Tale. He appears in two scenes — I, ii and II, i — but speaks only four lines in the first of these. In II, i, his role is more substantial, but still slight — he speaks eighteen lines. He is brought on stage so that his death, in III, ii, will have a greater effect upon us (I do not mean to sound callous). Not a very important part — but he does make an important contribution to the play. He names it.

Her.	Come, sir, now I am for you again. Pray you, sit by us, And tell's a tale.
Mam.	Merry or sad shall't be?
Her.	As merry as you will.
Mam.	A sad tale's best for winter. I have one Of sprites and goblins. (21-26)

(3) The Forwarding of the Action: Indirectly

This minor character does not himself do anything — but reports something. Very often, he is a Messenger. His function is twofold: he describes interscene action, and he

interrelates elements of the plot. In I, ii of Antony and Cleopatra, for instance, a Messenger tells Antony, "Fulvia thy wife is dead" (122). This Messenger, obviously, describes interscene action. In IV, vi, a Messenger reports to Caesar, "Antony/ Is come into the field" (7-8). Here, the Messenger interrelates plot elements — we have already seen Antony set out in IV, iv. And, of course, this Messenger (or comparable character) sometimes performs both functions — as does the one in I, iv:

Thy biddings have been done, and every hour,
Most noble Caesar, shalt thou have report
How 'tis abroad. Pompey is strong at sea,
And it appears he is belov'd of those
That only have fear'd Caesar. To the ports
The discontents repair, and men's reports
Give him much wrong'd.
(34-40)

There are about eighty of these minor characters: most of them carry out their assignments quickly, efficiently, and unobtrusively. We can say little about them, except that they play a necessary — though undistinguished — role. A few, however, merit further attention.

In The Winter's Tale, V, ii, we have the most extended use of this minor character to describe interscene action. Three Gentlemen discuss the "opening of the fardel," and the subsequent discovery that Perdita is daughter to Leontes. They are given some one hundred and twenty-one lines — most of them spoken by the third Gentleman:

Then have you lost a sight which was to be seen, cannot be spoken of. There might you have beheld one joy crown another, so and in such manner that it seem'd sorrow wept to take leave of them, for their joy waded in tears. There was casting up of eyes, holding up of hands, with countenance of such distraction that they were to be known by garment, not by favour. Our king, being ready to leap out of himself for joy of his found daughter, as if that joy were now become a loss, cries, "O, thy mother, thy mother!" then asks Bohemia forgiveness; then embraces his son-in-law; then again worries he his daughter with clipping her; now he thanks the old shepherd, which stands by like a weather-bitten conduit of many kings' reigns. I never heard of such another encounter, which lames report to follow it and undoes description to do it.

(46-63)

We are reminded of the Messenger in Greek tragedy: but it is doubtful whether Shakespeare had any such thing in mind. The climax of his play is to be the statue scene — and he cannot allow anything to detract from it. Therefore, the "opening of the fardel" must be reported.

Cornelius and Voltimand, in Hamlet, also describe inter-scene action — but, interestingly, the action described has little to do with the play:

Upon our first, he sent out to suppress
His nephew's levies, which to him appear'd
To be a preparation 'gainst the Polack,
But, better look'd into, he truly found
It was against your Highness. Whereat griev'd,
That so his sickness, age, and impotence
Was falsely borne in hand, sends out arrests
On Fortinbras; which he, in brief, obeys,
Receives rebuke from Norway, and in fine
Makes vow before his uncle never more
To give th' assay of arms against your Majesty.
Whereon old Norway, overcome with joy,

Gives him three thousand crowns in annual fee,
 And his commission to employ those soldiers,
 So levied as before, against the Polack;
 With an entreaty, herein further shown,
 That it might please you to give quiet pass
 Through your dominions for his enterprise,
 On such regards of safety and allowance
 As therein are set down.

(II, ii, 61-80)

Fortinbras' expedition against the Polack matters not at all to us: we are concerned with Hamlet, and how he effects his revenge. But Hamlet is one of Shakespeare's most carefully constructed plays, and he is here thinking a long way ahead. Fortinbras must appear at the very end of the play to take charge (inasmuch as everybody else is dead): and so Cornelius and Voltimand are necessary to prepare for this development.

Another minor character used to describe interscene action is the Messenger in IV, ii of King John. This Messenger reports, in part, that

as I hear, my lord,
 The Lady Constance in a frenzy died
 Three days before; but this from Rumour's tongue
 I idly heard; if true or false I know not.

(121-124)

Honigmann, in a note to this passage (the New Arden edition), observes that Constance really died three years before. He remarks,

Perhaps Shakespeare remembered that Constance died three somethings before, and the messenger's disclaimer (ll. 123-4) indicates Shakespeare's uncertainty....

(p. 102, n.)

The point I wish to make, though, is that, according to the

Messenger, Constance died "in a frenzy" — that is, in a fit of madness.³¹ Again, minor characters do not lie. The notion that Constance is an agent of divine vengeance is, fortunately, no longer current — and the realization that Shakespeare considered her rather insane should prevent us from reviving it.

Probably the best example of the minor character used to interrelate plot elements is the Servant in I, ii of Romeo and Juliet. His function is to tell Romeo and Benvolio of the "old accustomed feast" that Capulet is planning. He does so in a rather amusing way:

Find them out whose names are written
here! It is written that the shoemaker should
meddle with his yard and the tailor with his last, the
fisher with his pencil and the painter with his nets;
but I am sent to find those persons whose names are
here writ, and can never find what names the writing
person hath here writ. I must to the learned.
(38-44)

The learned, of course, turn out to be Romeo and Benvolio, who happen along at this time:

Serv. God gi' god-den. I pray, sir, can you read?
Rom. Ay, mine own fortune in my misery.
Serv. Perhaps you have learn'd it without book.
But, I pray, can you read anything you see?
Rom. Ay, if I know the letters and the language.
Serv. Ye say honestly. Rest you merry!
Rom. Stay, fellow; I can read.
(59-66)

His jovial good humour gives him — unlike most of these minor characters — a distinct personality:

My master
is the great rich Capulet; and if you be not of the

house of Montagues, I pray, come and crush a cup of
 wine. Rest you merry!
 (83-86)

Gower, in the Second Part of Henry the Fourth, is also
 worth mentioning, although in Falstaff's, rather than his own,
 right. He enters to the Chief Justice — who has been lecturing
 Falstaff — with news of the King and Prince Henry. The Chief
 Justice asks him two or three questions, quite ignoring Falstaff:

Ch. Just. I have heard better news.
 Fal. What's the news, my lord?
 Ch. Just. Where lay the King to-night?
 Gow. At Basingstoke, my lord.
 Fal. I hope, my lord, all's well. What is the
 news, my lord?
 Ch. Just. Come all his forces back?
 Gow. No; fifteen hundred foot, five hundred horse,
 Are march'd up to my Lord of Lancaster,
 Against Northumberland and the Archbishop.
 Fal. Comes the King back from Wales, my
 noble lord?
 Ch. Just. You shall have letters of me presently.
 Come, go along with me, good Master
 Gower.
 (II, i, 179-191)

Falstaff finally claims his attention with a stentorian, "My Lord!"
 (192); and then proceeds to assuage his injured dignity:

Ch. Just. What's the matter?
 Fal. Master Gower, shall I entreat you with me
 to dinner?
 Gow. I must wait upon my good lord here; I
 thank you, good Sir John.
 Ch. Just. Sir John, you loiter here too long,
 being you are to take soldiers up in counties
 as you go.
 Fal. Will you sup with me, Master Gower?
 Ch. Just. What foolish master taught you these
 manners, Sir John?
 Fal. Master Gower, if they become me not,
 he was a fool that taught them me. This

is the right fencing grace, my lord; tap
for tap, and so part fair.
(194-207)

The Chief Justice provides a fit conclusion:

Now the Lord lighten thee! thou art
a great fool.
(208-209)

And, finally, Dercetas in Antony and Cleopatra. He enters in IV, xiv, directly following Antony's attempt to kill himself. He does not make a very good impression upon us:

Thy death and fortunes bid thy followers fly.
This sword but shown to Caesar, with this tidings,
Shall enter me with him.
(111-113)

But, presenting the sword to Caesar, he still gives Antony his due:

He is dead, Caesar;
Not by a public minister of justice,
Nor by a hired knife; but that self hand
Which writ his honour in the acts it did
Hath, with the courage which the heart did lend it,
Splitted the heart. This is his sword;
I robb'd his wound of it; behold it stain'd
With his most noble blood.
(V, i, 19-26)

This encomium is all the more effective in coming from Dercetas.

One last observation: Antony and Cleopatra, more than any other play, makes use of reported action — there are a good dozen minor characters introduced for this sole purpose. And yet, Shakespeare so handles them (one might expect them to slow the play down) that the scope of the play is broadened immensely. It is very cleverly done.

(4) The Concluding of the Action

The minor character in this category is introduced to help bring the play to a close. Sometimes he ties up a loose end, as do the Messengers in V, iv of Much Ado About Nothing and V, iii of King Lear. The first reports to Don Pedro:

My lord, your brother John is ta'en in flight,
And brought with armed men back to Messina.
(127-128)

and the second informs Albany:

Edmund is dead, my lord.
(295)

Similarly, the English Ambassador in the final scene of Hamlet tells us of the death of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern:

The sight is dismal,
And our affairs from England come too late.
The ears are senseless that should give us hearing,
To tell him his commandment is fulfill'd,
That Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead.
Where should we have our thanks?
(378-383)

An identical task, though more important to the play as a whole, is performed by the Soldier in V, iv of Timon of Athens. He brings along Timon's epitaph:

My noble general, Timon is dead,
Entomb'd upon the very hem o' th' sea;
And on his grave-stone this insculpture, which
With wax I brought away, whose soft impression
Interprets for my poor ignorance.
(65-69)

And, for a last example, there is Jaques de Boys in As You Like It, who tells all assembled:

I am the second son of old Sir Roland,
 That bring these tidings to this fair assembly.
 Duke Frederick, hearing how that every day
 Men of great worth resorted to this forest,
 Address'd a mighty power, which were on foot,
 In his own conduct, purposely to take
 His brother here and put him to the sword;
 And to the skirts of this wild wood he came,
 Where meeting with an old religious man,
 After some question with him, was converted
 Both from his enterprise and from the world;
 His crown bequeathing to his banish'd brother,
 And all their lands restor'd to them again
 That were with him exil'd. This to be true,
 I do engage my life.

(158-172)

There is somewhat of a contradiction here, I think. Throughout the play, the Duke has been disparaging the life of the court and praising the natural life of the forest:

Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile,
 Hath not old custom made this life more sweet
 Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods
 More free from peril than the envious court?

(II, i, 1-4)

Sending him back to court at play's end, therefore, strikes us as a bit odd.

This minor character is also used to aid in the recapitulations Shakespeare often appends to his plays. In V, iii, of Romeo and Juliet, for instance, the Page explains to Escalus what Paris was doing in the graveyard:

He came with flowers to strew his lady's grave;
 And bid me stand aloof, and so I did.
 Anon comes one with light to ope the tomb,
 And by and by my master drew on him;
 And then I ran away to call the watch.

(281-285)

and Balthasar contributes :

I brought my master news of Juliet's death;
And then in post he came from Mantua
To this same place, to this same monument.
This letter he early bid me give his father,
And threat'ned me with death, going in the vault,
If I departed not and left him there.
(272-277)

In Antony and Cleopatra, a Guard describes Charmian's death
to Caesar :

O Caesar,
This Charmian liv'd but now; she stood and spake.
I found her trimming up the diadem
On her dead mistress. Tremblingly she stood
And on the sudden dropp'd.
(V, ii, 343-347)

and in Julius Caesar, Strato tells Octavius of Brutus' death :

Free from the bondage you are in, Messala;
The conquerors can but make a fire of him,
For Brutus only overcame himself,
And no man else hath honour by his death.
(V, v, 54-57)

Hymen, in V, iv of As You Like It, is used in a somewhat
similar way — but facilitates a denouement rather than a
recapitulation:

Peace, ho! I bar confusion.
'Tis I must make conclusion
Of these most strange events.
Here's eight that must take hands,
To join in Hymen's bands,
If truth holds true contents.
You and you no cross shall part;
You and you are heart in heart;
You to his love must accord,
Or have a woman to your lord;
You and you are sure together,
As the winter to foul weather.
Whiles a wedlock-hymn we sing,

Feed yourselves with questioning;
 That reason wonder may diminish,
 How thus we met, and these things finish.
 (131-146)

So too do the Doctor and Soothsayer in V, v of Cymbeline. The Soothsayer, I have discussed in a different context (see III, 3); the Doctor reports to Cymbeline the death of the Queen, and, more important, her deathbed confessions:

She did confess she had
 For you a mortal mineral, which, being took,
 Should by the minute feed on life, and ling'ring,
 By inches waste you; in which time she purpos'd,
 By watching, weeping, tendance, kissing, to
 O'ercome you with her show, and, in time,
 When she had fitted you with her craft, to work
 Her son into th' adoption of the crown;
 But, failing of her end by his strange absence,
 Grew shameless-desperate; open'd, in despite
 Of heaven and men, her purposes; repented
 The evils she hatch'd were not effected; so
 Despairing died.
 (49-61)

And, finally, this minor character is sometimes used to deliver the concluding comment of the play. A Lord in V, vi of Coriolanus, for instance, says of the dead Coriolanus:

Bear from hence his body;
 And mourn you for him. Let him be regarded
 As the most noble corse that ever herald
 Did follow to his urn.
 (143-146)

And Queen Isabel seems to find a place in V, ii of Henry the Fifth largely to speak these lines:

God, the best maker of all marriages,
 Combine your hearts in one, your realms in one!
 As man and wife, being two, are one in love,
 So be there 'twixt your kingdoms such a spousal,

That never may ill office, or fell jealousy,
 Which troubles oft the bed of blessed marriage,
 Thrust in between the paction of these kingdoms,
 To make divorce of their incorporate league;
 That English may as French, French Englishmen,
 Receive each other. God speak this Amen!
 (387-396)

I have discussed, in this chapter, minor characters who are concerned with the action of the plays. Shakespeare uses them, time and again, to get his plays underway, to plunge us immediately into the action; he uses them to forward the action; and he uses them to tie up the loose ends of his plays, to conclude the action. Most of them are messengers, or the equivalent of messengers — and, of course, the messages they deliver are always to be accepted as absolute truth. The importance of their roles is obvious.

Chapter V

OTHER MINOR CHARACTERS

We are left at this point with a number of minor characters whose function in the plays is rather obscure. They either do nothing at all, or do something that has no apparent connection with the play's action. Consequently, they have given rise to a good deal of speculation, which, in turn, has produced a good number of theories of revision, re-writing, and so forth. We cannot here attempt a thorough discussion of these theories, but we can at least list the minor characters concerned and offer what seems, to us, to be the most logical explanation for their presence in the plays.

In Cymbeline, I, v, we find a stage direction reading, "Enter Philario, Iachimo, a Frenchman, a Dutchman, and a Spaniard." The Dutchman and the Spaniard say nothing throughout the scene, and do not appear again. Now Cymbeline was first printed in the Folio of 1623, this text being followed in all subsequent editions. The text is a good one, and is obviously very close to Shakespeare's original. Sir Walter Greg thinks that it was set up from a prompt-book; Dr. Alice Walker and J. M. Nosworthy agree that it was set up from "a scribe's transcript of difficult foul papers which had preceded the prompt-book" (Cym, New Arden, p. xii). I do not mean to

cast judgement one way or the other: it is sufficient for my purposes that all three agree that F_1 is, indeed, close to Shakespeare's manuscript. Shakespeare, therefore, must be held accountable for the introduction of the Dutchman and the Spaniard. The manner of the scene was very probably suggested by the prose tale of Frederyke of Jennen, which was evidently quite popular in England in the sixteenth century (see Cym, New Arden, p. xxii):

In the yere of our lorde god M.CCCC.xxiiii it happened, that foure ryche marchautes departed out of diuers countreis for to do their marchaundise. And as they were goyng their iourneys, by fortune they mette all together and fel in company together; for thei were al foure goyng towarde Paris in Fraunce; and for company sake they rode al iiii into one ynne; and it was about shraf-tyd in the mooste ioyfull tyme of al the vere; and their names were called as here foloweth: the firste was called Courant of Spayne, the second was called Borcharde of Fraunce, the thirde was called John of Florence, and the iiii was called Ambrose of Jennen. (Quoted from Appendix A, New Arden Cym, p. 199)

But did Shakespeare change his mind during composition of the scene and decide to eliminate the Dutchman and the Spaniard? Nosworthy, in a footnote to the entry direction, lists these possibilities:

Granville-Barker suggests that the Dutchman and Spaniard may have worn distinctive national costume or that they may have been given an explanatory line or two, now lost. It is possible, however, that both characters were dispensed with when the play was actually brought to the stage. That they were depicted as drunk past the power of speech is not beyond Jacobean possibility.

(New Arden, p. 19)

In his introduction to the play, though, he speaks of "the superfluous and, apparently, discarded Dutchman and Spaniard" (New Arden, p. xii). I do not think them superfluous: they are meant to constitute, as so often elsewhere in Shakespeare, a part of the setting — and Granville-Barker is surely right in dressing them in national costumes. The scene builds upon the idea of international rivalry, and must, therefore, have an international flavour. We should also notice Philario's speech,

His father and I were soldiers together;
to whom I have been often bound for no less
than my life.

Enter Posthumus.

Here comes the Briton. Let him be so entertained amongst you as suits with gentlemen of your knowing to a stranger of his quality. — I beseech you all, be better known to this gentleman, whom I commend to you as a noble friend of mine. How worthy he is I will leave to appear hereafter, rather than story him in his own hearing.

(I, v, 26-35)

The wording almost necessitates the inclusion of the Dutchman and the Spaniard: "you all" would sound very strange applied to only Iachimo and the Frenchman. And we should notice too that the Frenchman, once he has performed his role (see II, 7), also becomes very reticent. Shakespeare, we must realize, was never bothered by this sort of thing: time and again characters are left standing about while he concerns himself with something else. He was, after all, writing for a company of professional actors: he knew quite well that they would have no trouble in thinking up some bit of business with which to occupy themselves.

Similarly, in Antony and Cleopatra, I, ii, a stage direction calls for the entry of, among others, Lamprius, Rannius, Lucillius, and Mardian (Lamprius might possibly be the Soothsayer) — and, again, not one of them speaks. Since Steevens, most editors have eliminated these four, and have brought Enobarbus on after line ten. M. R. Ridley, in the New Arden edition, makes what seems to me a very discerning comment:

The characters fall into two groups, one of Enobarbus, a soothsayer, and two (or three) non-speaking figures who, from their names, are presumably Romans; and an Egyptian group, of Cleopatra's waiting women, Mardian and Alexas The two groups come in simultaneously, but by different doors. The entry of both is covered by the brisk conversation of one, Enobarbus is there to give his order, and the soothsayer is where we want him, in the non-Egyptian group, so that Alexas can call him over.

(p. 9)

I thoroughly agree with him. Ridley also appends the observation of R. H. Case, the original Arden editor:

Plutarch gives his "grandfather Lampryas" as the authority for one of his stories. He does not mention Rannius or Lucillius.

(p. 9)

As a matter of fact, "Lucilius" is spoken of in "The Life of Marcus Antonius":

Antonius being arrived in Lybia, he sent Cleopatra before into Egypt from the city of Paraetonium; and he himself remained very solitary, having only two of his friends with him, with whom he wandered up and down, both of them orators, the one Aristocrates a Grecian, and the other Lucilius a Roman: of whom we have written in another place, that, at the battle where Brutus was overthrown by the city of Philippos, he came and willingly put

himself into the hands of those that followed Brutus, saying that it was he: because Brutus in the meantime might have liberty to save himself. And afterwards, because Antonius saved his life, he still remained with him, and was very faithful and friendly unto him till his death.

(Shakespeare's Plutarch, p. 214)

And a certain "Rhamnus" is one of Antony's guards:

Insomuch that Antonius called for one Rhamnus, one of his slaves enfranchised that was of his guard, and made him give him his faith that he would thrust his sword through him when he would bid him, and cut off his head, because he might not be taken alive of his enemies, nor known when he were dead.

(Shakespeare's Plutarch, p. 197)

Ridley also comments upon F₁'s stage direction after line 116, "Enter another Messenger," and F₁'s speech headings for lines 118 and 119 ("1. Mes." and "2. Mes."):

I have retained F's S.D.s, since I am not clear that the seeming difficulties justify the drastic changes which have been followed by almost all editors. Rowe cut out the S.D. at lines 109-10 [116-117]³² altogether, and Capell turned the messengers of lines 111 and 112 [118 - 119] into attendants. This runs smoothly enough, but the "Enter another Messenger" at lines 109-10 [116-117] is obstinately there and I do not think that F is at all impossible as it stands. The entering messenger finds that he has come from the wrong place, and calls to a group at the door to see whether there is another messenger who will give Antony what he wants; a second messenger in the group, eager to please, reports that there is such a messenger, waiting. I think that this perhaps gives better the general bustle of the scene, with messengers from various places coming with news, than the somewhat formal business with attendants summoning messengers in their proper turn.

(New Arden, p. 18)

Again, I quite agree with him.

One more point: F₁, in III, xii and xiii, regularly reads

"Thidias." Theobald emended to "Thyreus," since this form is given by North (Plutarch has "Thyrsus"). However, (siding with Dover Wilson and Ridley), I feel the emendation to be quite unjustified: Shakespeare often changes names in his source that, for some reason or other, do not satisfy him.

Another of these minor characters appears in III, v of All's Well That Ends Well, where we have the direction (in F₁), "Enter old Widow of Florence, her daughter, Violenta and Mariana, with other Citizens." Violenta says nothing, there is no mention made of her by the others, and by line 100 it becomes apparent that only Helena, the Widow, Diana, and Mariana are present. G. K. Hunter's suggestion is reasonable:

We may regard the comma preceding the name as a misprint or, at least, as not disjunctive and suppose that Violenta represents a first idea for Diana's name — an explanation reinforced by the wording of the entry for IV, ii.

(AWEW, New Arden, p. 83)

(The entry for IV, ii reads, "Enter Bertram and the maid called Diana.") Whatever the explanation, Violenta is certainly not required by the action, and neither is she needed to contribute to the setting ("other Citizens" are given this role). We might just as well dispense with her.

Also meriting discussion here is the Poet in IV, iii of Julius Caesar. He enters to Brutus and Cassius, and admonishes:

For shame, you generals! what do you mean?
Love, and be friends, as two such men should be;
For I have seen more years, I'm sure, than ye.

(130-132)

Cassius laughs at him, but Brutus orders him out:

What should the wars do with these jigging fools?
Companion, hence!

(137-38)

Shakespeare takes this incident from Plutarch's "Life of Marcus Brutus," but seems to have quite missed the point of it.

Plutarch (North's translation) says:

This Phaonius at that time, in despite of the door-keepers, came into the chamber, and with a certain scoffing and mocking gesture, which he counterfeited of purpose, he rehearsed the verses which old Nestor said in Homer:

"My lords, I pray you hearken both to me,
For I have seen mo years than suchie three."
Cassius fell a-laughing at him: but Brutus thrust him out of the chamber, and called him dog, and counterfeit Cynic. Howbeit his coming in brake their strife at that time, and so they left each other.

(Shakespeare's Plutarch, p. 135)

Shakespeare, however, has him enter after Brutus and Cassius have resolved their quarrel: and once he is hustled out, Brutus and Cassius make no further mention of him. I suppose it is conceivable that Shakespeare was working quickly and failed to appreciate fully the significance of the incident involving Phaonius -- but I feel that Shakespeare knew his North rather too well to commit such an obvious blunder. I am therefore inclined to think that something is missing here. Now this incident is directly followed by Brutus' account, to Cassius, of Portia's death -- an account which is generally thought to be Shakespeare's revision of lines 181-195. T. S. Dorsch, for instance, says:

. . . I take the "revised version" which Shakespeare added to replace this passage [Messala's account of Portia's death] to be ll. 142-57 and l. 165 [ll. 143-58 and l. 166]. In the "original version" of the scene without these lines, Brutus would presumably have carried on from l. 141 to what is now l. 158 [142 to 159].

(JC, New Arden, p. 106)

But could there not have been originally a number of intervening lines — which gave some point to the Poet's entrance — between the Poet episode and Messala's revelation of Portia's death?

These lines may have been inadvertently misplaced when the new version of Portia's death was inserted.

In Measure for Measure, too, we find signs of, at least, incidental revision involving a minor character. Varrius enters to the Duke in IV, v, and the Duke says to him:

I thank thee, Varrius; thou hast made good haste:
Come, we will walk. There's other of our friends
Will greet us here anon, my gentle Varrius.
(11-13)

Varrius is also listed in the entry direction for V, i, but neither speaks nor is spoken to. It would seem as if, at one time, he performed some service for the Duke — perhaps delivered a message. In any event, his obscure role in IV, v and V, i, together with the confusion involving Lucio, Mistress Overdone, Pompey, and Claudio in I, ii, and the Duke's involved letter-writing operations in IV, iii-v, certainly hint at some sort of revision — probably taking place during Shakespeare's writing of the play. The text for the 1623 Folio printing, then, was

quite possibly set up from a copy which transmitted the confusions in Shakespeare's foul papers. The theatre prompt-book would no doubt have resolved these difficulties — but precisely how, we cannot say.

Two rather perplexing minor characters are Captain Macmorris and Captain Jamy in Henry the Fifth, III, ii. They enter to Gower and Fluellen — and as they are approaching, Fluellen gives his opinion of each. Of Macmorris, an Irishman, he says:

By Cheshu, he is an ass, as in the world.
I will verify as much in his beard. He has no more
directions in the true disciplines of the wars, look
you, of the Roman disciplines, than is a puppy-dog.
(74-77)

But of Jamy, a Scotsman, he says:

Captain Jamy is a marvellous falorous
gentleman, that is certain; and of great expedition
and knowledge in th' aunchient wars, upon my
particular knowledge of his directions.
(81-84)

Fluellen and Macmorris then become involved in an argument, which is cut off by the sounding of a parley. Fluellen concludes:

Captain Macmorris, when there is more better
opportunity to be required, look you, I will be
so bold as to tell you I know the disciplines of war;
and there is an end.
(150-153)

But Captain Macmorris does not appear again — and neither, for that matter, does Captain Jamy. Shakespeare, I suppose, is demonstrating that Henry is universally in favor, that he is

supported by England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales -- but Macmorris and Jamy have so little to do with the story line that we are very tempted to label them a later addition. This hypothesis is supported by a number of other peculiarities found in Henry the Fifth: which are treated by J. H. Walters in the New Arden edition. He reaches the conclusion that,

. . . Falstaff originally accompanied Henry to France, but for some reason or other it was decided to change this and to kill him off.
(p. xliii)

A good deal of re-writing therefore became necessary. The reason, of course, is that Shakespeare soon realized that Falstaff would either run away with the play or leave the audience demanding more of him. Again, the Folio text (from which the text of the "bad" Quartos was no doubt derived) was probably set up from Shakespeare's own manuscript.

There is one more play with which we need concern ourselves -- Timon of Athens. Sir E. K. Chambers wrote of this play,

I do not doubt that it was left unfinished by Shakespeare, and I believe that the real solution of its "problem," indicated long ago by Ulrici and others, is that it is unfinished still.³³

He is, probably, quite right. In our study, we see this incompleteness reflected in the roles of the Fool and the Page. The Fool enters in II, ii with Apemantus; Caphis, and the Servants of Isidore and Varro are then on stage. The Fool greets them

with, "How do you, gentlemen?" (68). They reply, "Gramercies, good Fool; how does your mistress?" (69-70); and the Fool says:

She's e'en setting on water to scald such
chickens as you are. Would we could see you at
Corinth!

(71-73)

The Page now enters, and exchanges these words with Apemantus:

Page. Prithee, Apemantus, read me the super-
scription of these letters; I know not which
is which.

Apem. Canst not read?

Page. No.

Apem. There will little learning die, then, that day
thou art hang'd. This is to Lord Timon;
this to Alcibiades. Go; thou wast born a
bastard, and thou'lt die a bawd.

Page. Thou wast whelp'd a dog, and thou shalt
famish a dog's death. Answer not; I am
gone.

(81-91)

The Page exits: he does not appear again, and we hear nothing more of the letters. The Fool then delivers some uncomplimentary remarks about his mistress, adds a few more off-colour lines, and also exits. We never do learn who his mistress is. The whole episode is so obviously fragmentary and so obviously unconnected with the main action that we can scarcely avoid the conclusion that it is only a rough start on a comic sub-plot.

H. J. Oliver comments:

. . . It is tempting to speculate how the appearance of the Fool could have been developed like the Pompey scenes in Measure for Measure which do so much to make the Vienna of that play a real city and build up the background of general corruption against which the main story is played out.

(Tim, New Arden, p. xxvii)

For further evidence that Timon of Athens is an unfinished play, Oliver's introduction (to the New Arden) should be consulted.

This final chapter has dealt with those minor characters whose function in the plays is not altogether clear. Most of them seem to testify to some sort of revision — probably taking place in Shakespeare's manuscript during the course of composition. The prompt-book copies would no doubt have clarified the roles of these minor characters: lacking texts set up from prompt-books, though, all we can do is speculate — and not even that very assuredly.

Chapter VI

CONCLUSION

I have, throughout, emphasized Shakespeare's use of the minor character, and have said little about characterization. Although most of the minor characters are really quite character-less, a few do have personalities of their own.

"Cousin Capulet" of Romeo and Juliet, for instance, speaks only three lines, but yet is obviously rather ancient — and probably a "poor relation" as well. Replying to Capulet's question of when they were last in a mask, he says, "By 'r lady, thirty years" (35). When Capulet objects, saying that it was only twenty-five years ago, at the nuptial of Lucentio, he returns:

'Tis more, 'tis more. His son is elder, sir;
His son is thirty.
(40-41)

Again, the three citizens of Richard the Third, who speak the forty-seven lines of Act II, Scene iii, are also quite well characterized. The first Citizen is young, and continually optimistic:

Come, come, we fear the worst; all will be well.
(31)

The third Citizen is a good deal older, is pessimistic, and speaks in that sententious manner often characteristic of the

elderly:

When clouds are seen, wise men put on their cloaks;
 When great leaves fall, then winter is at hand;
 When the sun sets, who doth not look for night?
 Untimely storms makes men expect a dearth.
 All may be well; but, if God sort it so,
 'Tis more than we deserve or I expect.
 (32-37)

And the second Citizen falls somewhere in between: he sees things rather more clearly than do the other two:

O, full of danger is the Duke of Gloucester,
 And the Queen's sons and brothers haught and proud!
 And were they to be rul'd, and not to rule,
 This sickly land might solace as before.
 (27-30)

We do, then, sometimes see Shakespeare's powers of characterization reflected in his minor characters.

But sometimes, only — most of these people are colorless, one-sided. And the very fact that they are so should indicate to us their most important characteristic: they always speak the truth. And it is precisely this attribute that constitutes their dramatic usefulness. They are an infallible index to the true course of events of the play. The only minor character who might be accused of untruthfulness is Seleucus, in Antony and Cleopatra, V, ii. It has long been recognized³⁴ that Cleopatra expects Seleucus to contradict her when she says,

. . . Let him speak, my lord,
 Upon his peril, that I have reserv'd
 To myself nothing.
 (142-144)

But this is not to say that the episode is rehearsed, and that

Seleucus speaks, not the truth, but what he has been told to speak. Rather, I should think that Cleopatra has kept back some "immoment toys," and that Seleucus is entirely unaware that he is being used to deceive Caesar. When Cleopatra orders him to, "Speak the truth, Seleucus," she knows that that is precisely what he will do. As North's Plutarch puts it:

But by chaunce there stoode Seleucus by, one of her Treasurers, who to seeme a good servant, came straight to Caesar to disprove Cleopatra, that she had not set in al, but kept many things back of purpose.

(p. 225)

Seen in this light, then, the deception succeeds only because the minor character — Seleucus — is truthful.

Critics have sometimes tended to accept a minor character's words as true only when those words supported the particular critic's favorite interpretation of a play: and have conveniently ignored the minor character when he says something that clashes with this interpretation. To repeat: the minor characters are an infallible index to the true course of events of the play. I have found no exceptions to this rule.

The minor characters in Shakespeare's plays, then, are important — as I hope I have demonstrated in these pages. They almost invariably serve a definite purpose in the play: ranging all the way from mere eye appeal to a vehicle for per-

sonal comment by Shakespeare. Consequently, while economy is generally much to be admired, the producer must not allow this consideration to lead him to wholesale cutting of such characters as servants and messengers and gentlemen. Indeed, I would advocate the retention of all these people, except for a few of those noted in Chapter V. Shakespeare's skill as a dramatist, we can be sure, extended to his use of minor characters.

FOOTNOTES

1. Other minor characters who establish time, place, atmosphere are: Forester, LLL, IV, i; Hostess, TofS, Ind., i; Executioners, John, IV, i; Three Serving-Men, R&J, I, v; Two or Three Serving-Men, R&J, IV, ii; Three or Four Serving-Men, R&J, IV, iv; Two Carriers, 1H4, II, i; Two Drawers, 2H4, II, iv; Boy, T&C, III, ii; Servant, Meas, II, ii; Sewer and divers Servants, Mcb, I, vii; Servant, Tim, III, i; Two or Three Servants, A&C, II, vii; Soldier, Captain, A&C, IV, iv; Philemon, Per, III, ii; Tyrian Sailor, Per, V, i; Two Officers, Cor, II, ii; Gentleman, WT, II, ii; Time, WT, IV, i.
2. Other minor characters who interrelate scenes are: Servant, R&J, I, iii; Serving-Man, Merch, I, ii; Messenger, Merch, II, ix; Messenger, Merch, V, i; and Messenger, MAdo, III, v.
3. Other minor characters who indicate the passage of time are: Serving-Men, R&J, I, v; Captain, R2, II, iv; and Old Man, Mcb, II, iv.
4. William Shakespeare, Love's Labour's Lost, ed. Richard David, Methuen and Co. Ltd. (London, 1951), p. xvi. Further references to the New Arden editions of Shakespeare's

plays will be acknowledged in my text: for example, LLL,
New Arden, p. xvi.

5. Other minor characters who motivate exits are: Messenger, TofS, III, i; Servant, Mcb, II, i; Messenger, A&C, III, vii; Lady, Cym, I, iii; Messenger, Cym, II, iii; and Messenger, Cym, V, iv.
6. Other minor characters who identify a major character are: Salerio, Merch, IV, i, who identifies Nerissa as the Lawyer's Clerk (but see II, 6); Messenger, H5, II, iv, who identifies the English Ambassador (Exeter); Captain, Hml, IV, iv, who identifies Fortinbras; Attendant, Hml, IV, vi, who identifies the Sailor; Officer, Oth, I, iii, who identifies a "messenger from the galleys"; Servant, Tim, I, ii, who identifies Cupid as a "forerunner" to the Ladies; Guardsman, A&C, V, ii, who identifies the Clown as a "rural fellow."
7. E. A. J. Honigmann, editor of the New Arden King John, points out (p. xlii) that in the anonymous Troublesome Raigne of John, King of England, Essex appears throughout the play, together with the two other earls, Salisbury and Pembroke. In Shakespeare's play, Essex disappears after this scene, and his place is taken by Bigot (from IV, iii on). Honigmann's suggestion, that Shakespeare forgot the name of his third earl, seems quite plausible. If so, then we must think of Essex

and Bigot as the same character.

8. Two minor characters of this group I have not discussed. They are Chatillon, John, II, i, who directs attention to the entrance of the English forces; and a Gentleman, AWEW, V, iii, who directs attention to the entrance of Diana and the Widow.
9. For a much fuller discussion of the role of this Doctor, see Paul H. Kocher, "Lady Macbeth and the Doctor," Shakespeare Quarterly, V (1954), 341-349.
10. Other minor characters in this category are: Captain, TA, I, i, who characterizes Titus; Fairy, MND, II, i, who characterizes Robin Goodfellow; Clerk, Merch, IV, i, who characterizes Balthazar; Chamberlain, 1H4, II, i, who characterizes Gadshill; Gentleman, Hml, IV, v, who characterizes Ophelia; Doctor, Lear, IV, iv and IV, vii, who characterizes King Lear; Gentlewoman, Mcb, V, i, who characterizes Lady Macbeth.
11. Norman Nathan, "Caius Ligarius and Julius Caesar," Notes and Queries, VII (Jan., 1960), 16-17.
12. Other minor characters in this category are: Gentlemen, R3, I, ii, who characterize Gloucester; Berkeley, R2, II, iii, who characterizes York; Hostess, TofS, Ind, i, who

characterizes Sly; Messenger, H5, III, vii, who characterizes the French; Messenger, Meas, IV, ii, who characterizes Angelo; Barnardine, Meas, IV, iii, who characterizes Vincentio; Messenger, Mcb, I, v, who characterizes Lady Macbeth; Servant, Tim, I, ii, who characterizes Timon; Thyreus, A&C, III, xiii, who characterizes Antony and Cleopatra; Three Lords, Per, II, ii, who characterize Simonides; Messenger, Cor, I, iv, who characterizes Coriolanus (and Lartius).

13. Other minor characters who serve as straight men are: Keeper, R3, I, iv; Servant, R2, III, iv; Tubal, Merch, III, i; Four or Five Serving-Men, TofS, IV, i; Tailor and Haberdasher, TofS, IV, iii; Servant, 1H4, II, iii; Sir Michael, 1H4, IV, iv; Mouldy, Shadow, Wart, Feeble, Bullcalf, 2H4, III, ii; Second Watch, MAdo, III, iii; William, AYLI, V, i; William Page, MW, IV, i; Reynaldo, Hml, II, i; Second Gravedigger, Hml, V, i; Osric, Hml, V, ii; Servant, T&C, V, v; Froth, Meas, II, i; Phrynia and Timandra, Tim, IV, iii; Three Banditti, Tim, IV, iii; Soothsayer, A&C, I, ii; Silius, A&C, III, i; Servitors, A&C, IV, ii; Escanes, Per, II, iv; Soldier, Cor, I, x; Second Gentleman, Cym, I, i; Lord, Cym, V, iii.

14. T. W. Baldwin, The Organization and Personnel of the

Shakespearean Company, Princeton University Press
(Princeton, 1927), p. 246.

15. Ibid., p. 254.
16. Ibid., p. 241.
17. Ibid., p. 243.
18. Ibid., p. 274.
19. The Two Noble Kinsmen, ed. C. H. Herford, J. M. Dent and Co. (London, 1909).
20. William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, ed. Michael Macmillan, Methuen and Co. Ltd. (London, 1927), p. 162, n..
21. Other minor characters in this category are: Keeper, R3, I, iv; French Ambassador, H5, I, ii; Captain, Hml, IV, iv.
22. Other minor characters used for emphasis are: Margarelon, T&C, V, vii; Second and Third Servants, Lear, III, vii; Servants of Varro and Isidore, Tim, II, ii; Lucius and Sempronius, Tim, III, ii and iii; Third Servant, Tim, III, iii; Two Messengers, Cor, IV, vi; Two Captains, Cym, V, iii.
23. J. M. Nosworthy, "The Bleeding Captain Scene in Macbeth," Review of English Studies, XXII (1946), p. 126.

24. Ibid., 129-130.
25. William Shakespeare, Works, ed. W. A. Neilson and C. J. Hill, Houghton Mifflin Company (Cambridge, Mass., 1942), p. 1180.
26. Other minor characters who initiate the action are: Travers, 2H4, I, i; Jeweller, Merchant Painter, and Poet, Tim, I, i; Citizens, Cor, I, i.
27. Shakespeare's Plutarch, ed. W. W. Skeat, MacMillan and Co., Ltd. (London, 1904), p. 136. Hereafter cited, in my text, as Shakespeare's Plutarch.
28. Ibid..
29. Shakespeare's Holinshed, ed. W. G. Boswell-Stone, Chatto and Windus (London, 1907), p. 33. Italics mine.
30. William Shakespeare, Macbeth, ed. John Dover Wilson, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge, 1951), p. 137.
31. "Frenzy," for the Elizabethans, was synonymous with "madness." See Lily B. Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes, Cambridge University Press (London, 1930), 79ff..
32. The numbering of Neilson and Hill differs from that of the New Arden, and is given in square brackets.

33. E. K. Chambers, William Shakespeare, Clarendon Press (Oxford, 1930), I, p. 482.
34. H. H. Furness, in his edition of the 1907 New Variorum Antony and Cleopatra, credits A. Stahr with first pointing out the true significance of Seleucus' role: in 1864.

B29792